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**WORKING FOR THE COMPETITION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE  
LOCAL NEWS POOL**

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**WORKING FOR THE COMPETITION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE  
LOCAL NEWS POOL**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

To my husband Nathan and son Asher. Without their love, patience, and support this dissertation and Ph.D. would not have been possible.

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# **Working for the competition: An analysis of the local news pool**

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The Local News Pool or “LNP” as it’s referred to concerns competing television news stations within a single market forming a cooperative partnership in order to share content such as video and interviews. This study used depth interviews with assignment editors, producers, and photographers in Austin, Texas, Tampa, Florida, and Denver, Colorado, and incorporated a quantitative content analysis of news stories assigned to the LNP in Austin to discover how this convergence model operates, its effects on workers, and the potential for homogenization.

This study discovered that by incorporating this convergence model into a newsroom and categorizing certain stories as “shared” it altered the level of importance photographers and producers placed on the story. By these journalists having prior knowledge that the competition might use or have an interest in a certain story, it altered the value placed on it to one of something “extra” or “filler” and not highly desired for the news broadcast.

In addition, this study provides an updated look at the multilayer gatekeeping process by incorporating competing organizations within this decision making process. This study found gatekeepers cooperate on stories each find would produce similar content if their station were to send their own crews. The aspect of competition becomes present when gatekeepers request stories not intended for the LNP such as breaking news.

The level of cooperation is often based on ratings and perception of one's willingness to reciprocate if needed.



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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

Diversification of local television news has often come in the form of converging with a local newspaper or radio station. The convergence model came about as competition was growing, cost cutting measures were being instituted throughout the industry, and pressure was mounting on stations to produce new and different kinds of content to attract a fragmented audience (Smith, Tanner, & Duhe, 2007). Corporations began looking outside of their four walls to find other resources to enhance their coverage of local news.

As a result a new type of convergence model has emerged called the “Local News Pool” or “Local News Service”. Often referred to as, “LNP” or “LNS”, it started in 2009 in Philadelphia when the FOX and NBC stations formed a news pool partnership (Malone, 2009). The idea behind this convergence model is efficiency. Instead of having each station send a crew to a news conference or a house fire, the news service sends one crew to feed the same video to both stations (Potter, 2009). The goal is by freeing up additional resources the station can create more enterprise stories (Malone, 2009) resulting in more distinctive newscasts (Potter, 2009). Managers call it a cost cutting mechanism because the number of hours local news is on the air has increased by 35% over the last seven years while the number of staff has dropped by 4.3 percent. The average TV station in 2010 was producing five hours of news per day compared to 4.6

hours in 2009 and 3.8 hours in 2006 (Papper, 2010) resulting in the need for more content.

Waldman (2011) found in the Los Angeles local television news market an LNP assignment editor is funded by three of the local stations. This person's role is to coordinate a crew from each station on what they will cover for the group. Often in Los Angeles it is a sporting event or press conference with a local official. In Austin, Texas, it's much the same with stories found on press releases that dominate the LNP coverage. Items such as ribbon cuttings, capitol press conferences, and environmental news conferences are often chosen (West, 2012).

In either case the overall goal is to cover stories that are considered non-competitive, meaning each station would have known about the event through a press release. And if each station attended the event they would likely capture the same video and interviews as the competing stations. By allowing one station to cover it for the group, the thought process among managers is it allows for more news within a broadcast because they are still able to gather the press release stories while at the same time freeing up other crews for enterprise news that could set their station apart. However when a station elects to rely on the competition to provide information concerning an event certain aspects such as new sources and additional stories can be missed leading many to question its journalistic role (Geisler, 2009; Project for Excellence, 2010; Stearns & Wright, 2011; Waldman, 2011).

This research will analyze where the LNP fits within the hierarchy of influences model which suggests multiple layers of gatekeepers making decisions, and explore how

this new convergence model affects the gatekeeping process, and its potential to homogenize local news. In addition this paper will examine how the LNP fits into the previous convergence models and how this particular model of competitors forming a cooperative relationship, otherwise referred to as coopetition, sets it apart from the others. This was done by conducting depth interviews with broadcast journalists working within the local news pool and analyzing the stories assigned to the LNP with a quantitative content analysis.

This research is important because it examines a new aspect of convergence. Instead of assignment editors at each news station working separately to decide the stories the photographers will shoot, these managers are working together. The competition aspect of the organization is taken away and there is a transformation to one of cooperation, at least temporarily - something that has been unheard of among local television stations until now.

This new convergence model has the potential to change several aspects of how a newsroom goes about gathering news of the day and how it is delivered to the audience who is assuming the station they are watching gathered the content they are viewing. In addition, it leads to a transformation of how a news worker gathers the news either by videotaping additional content, assignment editors looking for content that can be shared on a daily basis, or producers relying on the competition to provide content for their newscast.

In a time when news consumers are demanding more from news producers and businesses are cutting back on resources, the LNP has the potential to change the

business model of news gathering. Never before have competing news organizations agreed to share content on a regular basis in an effort to save time and resources. By stations pooling their efforts and only sending a single station to cover an event that in the past would have been covered by multiple stations leads one to question if this notion of coopetition will lead to the homogenization of news. Because each LNP partner is provided the same content there are fewer voices that can be chosen as sound bites for the audience and the video is limited by the perspective of a photographer from one station. In addition, each station must trust the competition to provide all of the elements that were taped during the event. This means the station providing the content hasn't taped something extra or important at the event that they plan to keep for themselves. These are important aspects to analyze as television stations strive to provide more news content on television and the web in order to satisfy consumers who are demanding more from news producers.



# **LITERATURE REVIEW**

## **Chapter Two**

### **Theory**

#### **GATEKEEPING THEORY**

In the Austin, Texas, television market the LNP is run by the assignment editors from the NBC, CBS, ABC, and FOX affiliates (West, 2012). The group conducts a daily conference call to discuss how they will work collaboratively. The assignment manager from the NBC affiliate looks through the day's press releases to determine what might be of interest for the group. He sends an e-mail to the other assignment editors prior to the conference call so each has an idea of the day's possible stories. During the call the assignment editors will often voice which stories their station would have an interest in covering for the group or if they would like to add any additional content to the list. The action that is occurring during this daily morning conference call is four gatekeepers using their knowledge of what they think is news to decide which stories are important and which ones to discard.

The theory of gatekeeping is one of the oldest in the field of mass communication. Psychologist Kurt Lewin (1947) first proposed it suggesting that items selected or rejected for food consumption as they pass through "channels". This idea was picked up by David Manning White (1950) who conducted a case study on a newspaper wire service editor and his selection of the day's news. He found that the editor's decisions were "highly subjective...[and] based on the gatekeeper's own set of experiences,

attitudes, and expectations” as to what constitutes news. Snider (1967) duplicated White’s study and found the results to be very similar. Bleske (1991) found female wire editors made the same types of decisions.

McNelly (1959) suggested multiple layers of gatekeepers within a news organization making decisions on how a story was told. He looked at the role of a foreign correspondent and found while the correspondent may be the gatekeeper when it comes to deciding which stories to cover, once that story is sent to the regional bureau editor it can be cut into a shorter version or combined with a related story. The state bureau may trim it down and then the reader of the story can act as the gatekeeper by either deciding to read it or pass along that information to friends, family, or associates. The LNP can also be viewed through McNelly’s findings of multiple layers of gatekeepers making decisions. By incorporating four gatekeepers from four separate organizations, each person comes with their own sets of standards based on how their organization is run and the expectations of that organization. Berkowitz (1990) found McNelly’s research could be applied to a television newsroom. His findings indicate the decision makers for news stories are primarily the news director, assistant news director, or assignment editor – not the reporter. In addition, pre-planned events took precedence over enterprise stories since it took fewer resources and research to put the story together.

Gatekeeping theory has often explored how single gatekeepers from single business organizations come to their daily news decisions. This theory is inadequate to explain the new convergence model of the LNP.

RQ 1 asks, how does the LNP affect the gatekeeping theory process?

It's important to discover how the decision process is affected when multiple gatekeepers from competing organizations make news decisions for the group since it ultimately impacts the news consumer. This research aims to discover the reasoning behind the decisions of why certain stories are selected over others for the LNP as well as the decision making process of which station shoots the event. By analyzing the station providing the content it is also important to learn if that leads the gatekeepers from the competing organizations to have a greater desire to air the story knowing the competition is gathering the elements. Findings from this RQ could add a new aspect to gatekeeping theory where competing organizations make a group decision on what is news.

When analyzing the LNP, the frequency in which a topic is chosen by the gatekeepers to be reported on and the method in which it is presented could demonstrate its overall importance or lack of in the competitive news cycle.

RQ2 asks, what is the most common type of LNP story used in a newscast?

Findings from this RQ hope to discover if certain topics such as police, fire, crime, spot news, court, consumer, military, rally, feature, sports, health, education, government, travel, or other are more or less likely to be utilized within a newscast. In addition, when analyzing the story type it's important to look at how the story is presented, such as a VO (voice over), vo/sot (voice over with a sound bite), or package (a reporter tracked story

with video and sound bites). Because each of these methods of presentation varies in length between 20 seconds and two minutes, the one utilized by the station could determine its importance within a newscast. Previous research (Soloski, 1989) found the length of the news story is a method to maximize audience size and maintain firm control over the marketplace. This means the longer news stories such as a package are deemed more important by a station because it requires more time and effort by a journalist. It also allows the audience to receive more information about the story. Findings from this study could provide a new aspect to gatekeeping theory that looks at frequency of use based on group decision making instead of just individual decision makers.

#### **HIERARCHY OF INFLUENCES MODEL**

This decision making process can be viewed through the work of Shoemaker and Reese (1996) who suggest a multi-layer process for gatekeeping - finding that individual gatekeepers are influenced by five levels of forces including individual, media routines, organizational, extramedia, and ideological. Influence on content from individual media workers looks at the effect gender, education, and length of time working in the news business has on a workers personal beliefs and attitudes concerning news judgment. Researchers found these can be factors in deciding media content (Craft & Wanta, 2004). This study will gather those three components to add context to the analysis.

Influence of media routines asks what are the stable, patterned sets of expectations and constraints that are common to most media organization. The LNP has the potential to change those routines by requiring assignment editors to work with the

competition deciding on shared daily content, producers relying on the competition for content, and photographers being required to tape enough video and interviews to allow competing organizations choices on what to air during the newscast. It may be the routinized practices of news work that act as surrogates or shortcuts for individual people's decisions. For example, there are news industry wide and commonly held views about whether an event is considered newsworthy. Research has found these routine forces are learned by the journalists over time and they view and judge certain news stories as a way to define them as predictable events that can be handled through routines (Tuchman, 1978). These forces are critical in determining which items move through the news channel and which ones are rejected (Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim, & Wrigley, 2001). It's important to discover if the LNP is affected by these routines.

Organizational influences on content looks how the organization is structured, how authority is exercised within, and how producers of content, i.e.: reporters, are affected by other parts of the media organization. The LNP could affect the organization by changing the business model of how news is gathered. Instead of relying on one staff to cover the day's news, multiple staffs from multiple organizations are incorporated. By the LNP becoming part of the fabric of the organization it has the potential to change how the staff views newsgathering methods over the long term. This study will analyze the affects the LNP has on news workers who take part in this convergence model on a daily basis.

Influences on content from outside the media organization concerns reporter's sources, people on the street, big business, interest groups, other media organization like

competing stations, advertisers, and the audience. By converging with the competition, the LNP could affect big business, interest groups, and more specifically the public relations firms that promote them. By only having one station gathering interviews and video to share with the group, it could limit the amount of information a station provides to its audience creating the potential for fewer angles to a news story. In addition public relations firms now pitch their ideas to news stations by suggesting it become part of the LNP. The thinking is that it is better to have one station for the group than none at all. This study will analyze how stories are pitched to the station through observation of the daily conference call. In addition this research will seek to discover which stories are most often chosen for the LNP through a content analysis of newscasts. It also will be important to discover if competing media organizations broadcast the same LNP story. Because the competition is part of an outside influence within the hierarchy, the question becomes whether an organization has a greater desire to air a story if it has prior knowledge that the competition plans to use it in its broadcast. This is important because in the past stations only learned about the desires of the competition if they attended the same event.

The other major aspect of influences on content outside of the media organization concerns the audience. This group is not made aware of the fact the story they are viewing is part of the LNP. This apparent lack of transparency could impact their view of the story. This study will determine whether stations consider this lack of acknowledgement important and if there have been steps taken to provide the audience with more context as to who covered the story.

And finally the ideological level centers on how diverse groups with conflicting interests hang together in a society (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). While this level is a part of the hierarchy of influences, this study will not analyze society's role within the LNP. Once the ground work is laid concerning the LNP, future studies could look at its impact on this broader picture.

When viewing the hierarchy of influences model as a whole the aspect of convergence among competing organizations is missing.

RQ 3 asks, what effect does a cooperative relationship have on newsroom routines within the levels of the hierarchy of influences model?

Previous research has focused on single newsrooms or ones that have converged with outside organizations such as a newspaper and television station partnership. This type of convergence model differs from the LNP since newspaper and television station collaborations are not in direct competition with one another. While each is competing for readers or viewers, they are considered to be on different platforms and often times the organizations will promote their converged coverage, something the LNP does not do. Findings from this study aim to determine if the patterned sets of expectations and constraints change when competing news organizations form a cooperative relationship in an effort to create a shared news product – something that has not been looked at concerning organizations within the same platform sharing content on a daily basis. Specifically this research will analyze the routines of assignment managers, news

producers, and photographers. Because these three job positions are most likely to be involved in the daily LNP, it's important to discover if their routines are changed in order to learn the potential impact it has on the overall news making process.

## **THE NEGOTIATION OF POWER**

In order for the Gatekeepers in charge of the LNP to select stories a new relationship of coopetition is formed, leading to the negotiation of power. Negotiation often refers to discussions among people aimed at resolving seemingly incompatible interests (Pruitt, 1981). However for the LNP, the interests of the competing organizations lie in gathering more content for their newscast, negotiating which station will shoot a story and if all four stations participate equally. Research has found the expectations of a "counterpart's cooperativeness or competitiveness affects the demand and concession making process" often led by the motivation the negotiator brings to the table (Ten Velden, Beersma, & De Dreu, 2009, p. 438). For example, organizations that expect more cooperation engage in less lying and deception and make more concessions when their competition has a cooperative attitude verses a competitive one (Steinel & De Dreu, 2004). This would be an ideal situation for the LNP decision makers, however the key to the negotiation process and level of participation might be found within the rankings of the television stations.

Previous research has found stations that are number one in a market or an ABC affiliate is most likely to opt out of participation in the LNP (Papper, 2010). Because high ratings equal power within a television market, leading to demands for such things



as higher rates for advertisers, it can equate to a lesser need to rely on the LNP for content, resulting in lower motivation to participate. Higgins (1998) explains this by describing each side in the negotiation process as either an “aversive competitor” or an “appetitive competitor”. Aversive competitors want to avoid losing and are likely to have goals related to protection and responsibility. On the other hand appetitive competitors are described as being motivated to win and are more likely to have goals related to growth and accomplishment. The highest rated station would fall under the “appetitive” status and research shows this status can ultimately impact their participation.

Ten Velden, et al. (2011) found aversive competitors respond differently to their appetitive competitors depending on whether or not they perceive them behaving cooperatively or competitively. Since aversive competitors have a fear of falling behind, they will often prefer a cooperative relationship. For example, aversive competitors would find it important to participate in the LNP equally. However when an aversive competitor finds the appetitive competitor acting competitively they are likely to make more demands and smaller concessions. Meanwhile the appetitive competitor doesn’t differentiate between competitive and cooperative expectations, because in both cases they believe their advantage is best served by high demands and small concessions. This example further proves Papper’s (2010) research showing the number one station is less likely to take part. West (2012) found the number one station is the Austin, Texas, market, which is also an ABC affiliate, did not have a strong desire to take part in the LNP and was often less willing to shoot stories because they felt it wasn’t needed in their newscast.

On the flip side, Ten Velden, et al. (2011) finds this relationship among competitors can change when the aversive competitor perceives the appetitive competitor as behaving cooperatively. This leads the aversive competitor to make smaller demands and larger concessions. However this is only the case when it initially perceives the appetitive competitor as acting competitively but experiences a more cooperative relationship. In either case, the power of negotiation falls on the appetitive competitor to set the tone for the group. Concerning the LNP it could be stated that while it is a group effort it is controlled by the actions of the highest rated television station, leading to a trickle-down effect for how the others participate and perceive one another.

The aspects of cooperation and competition are found to represent a fundamental dichotomy in negotiation (Pruitt, 1991). Negotiators experiencing “positive affect” are more cooperative, whereas those experiencing “negative affect” tend to be more competitive (Van Kleef, De Dreu, Pietroni, & Manstead, 2006). Those that are cooperative are found to achieve better joint outcomes, outperform negatively framed negotiators when they are positively framed, and engage in “greater information exchange and more systematic concessions” (Olekains, Smith, and Kibby, 1996). This can be examined through what is called “social value orientations” or SVO’s. Three of the dominant orientations include cooperation, competition, and individualism which emphasize maximizing one’s gains. Olekains, et al. (1996) find the strongest evidence for the differences in SVO’s come from the initial demands made by the opponents. Those can be demonstrated as pro-self where the individual takes a greater share of the resources, one show a higher level of demand than cooperators in negotiations, or one

sees greater differences in the concession levels within the negotiation process. Ten Velden et al. (2011) describe this as “competitive motivation”. Within the LNP it could be found that the highest rated television station is a greater competitive force within the negotiating process leading to their demands being met or not having their lack of participation questioned by others.

Ultimately this dynamic is about power. Power can be broadly defined as the ability to exert influence on other people (Bacharach & Lawler, 1981). For example, powerful parties tend to have higher aspirations, demand more, and concede less. As a result, those who are powerful negotiators tend to end up with the “larger share of the pie” (Giebels, De Dreu, & Van de Vliert, 2000). This may help explain why Fiske (1993) found individuals with high power lack motivation to pay attention to others, whereas those with low power are motivated to gain or regain control by paying close attention to the people they depend on.

Within this negotiation process one must also examine the precompetitive behavior which is found during the time of development where there is collaboration but no competition (O'Donnell, 2008). Concerning the LNP, this would correspond to the daily conference call or e-mail between news stations when it comes to making decisions on which news stories the stations will share among the group. Previous research on this topic has often dealt with companies working together to create new drugs to bring on the market (Littman & Francesco, 2010; Patlak, 2010). Others have examined industries such as SEMATECH which shared technologies with another company to build common, industry-wide competencies such as supplier quality, in a cooperative manner

(Carayannis & Alexander, 2004). In both cases the goal is create a product together that can provide mutual benefit to all parties involved. The LNP is also designed to create this mutual benefit by having four stations work in a collaborative manner.

Based on these findings RQ 4 asks, how does the level of participation affect the LNP partners?

While the LNP is designed to create an equal playing field for participates where each station is given the same content, previous research (Higgins, 1998) shows the negotiation of power is not equal. In this case power for deciding whether to participate in the LNP could be demonstrated by paying particular attention to the highest rated television station. Those with the highest ratings are more likely to have greater control on participation or lack thereof. However, even if the highest rated station doesn't participate it still receives content from the competing organizations. The downside for those cooperatively taking part is a lack of additional content if in fact the dominant station is not participating on a consistent basis. This study could further the negotiation research by discovering if participation is based on power or if a new method for negotiation is created by the LNP.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Convergence**

#### **CONVERGING TO CREATE THE LOCAL NEWS POOL**

The concept of pooling video and sharing it among television stations is not new in fact networks have been doing it for years, mainly with covering courtroom stories (Bock, 2009). But a recent survey (Papper, 2010) found 60% of local television stations across the United States are now in some type of cooperative news gathering agreement with another medium. Twenty three percent of respondents reported that agreement is with another local television station. The most common type of item shared among the stations was information (32%) followed by pool video (15%). Papper (2010) reported that the findings from this survey showed the TV business model is changing and their priorities are a “far cry from the television industry just a few years ago”.

But the LNP differs in several ways from video pooling practices used by the network. First it occurs on a daily basis. In contrast pool video is typically provided during special news events such as a court hearing or city council meeting. During a court hearing television stations will often dub the video onsite via the feed. City council meetings are often fed out to television stations while the meeting is taking place instead of being shot and distributed at a later time. In addition, state governments often have their own pool system to provide media video of proceedings in the chamber that are framed to the specifications of the lawmakers. Second, traditional pool video can also concern one story in which stations enter into a one-time agreement to share the content

due to a lack of other options. An example would be a court hearing where a judge will only allow one camera in the courtroom. In contrast the LNP occurs on a daily basis and the shared agreement leads most stations within a market to participate in the process. Finally, traditional pool video often has a set time when it will feed to other stations or when they can dub the video (Bock, 2009).

While convergence among local television stations is recent, news departments working together in various platforms have converged for years. Convergence refers to the merging and repurposing of content to fit into broadcast, newsprint, Internet, and even multimedia applications under a common corporate identity (Landsberger, 2004). The LNP creates this common corporate identity by showing ownership of stories not produced by their own station. For example, if the ABC affiliate shares a story the NBC affiliate airs in its news broadcast that station never mentions to the audience a competing station provided the content – instead it displays it as if it were produced exclusively for that television station. In addition, any of the stories provided under the LNP can be used on a station's website or in promotional material – all aspects of convergence without the promotion to the audience that competing television stations within a single market have a partnership.

The working practice of convergence began after a federal relaxation of cross-ownership rules, coupled with growing indifference to the once-sacred perception about potential conflicts of interest associated with newspaper and broadcast conglomerations creating an alliance (Morton, 2000). A study in 2004 found these converged alliances

were more effectual if members uphold individual commitments and work collectively to advance the alliance's goals (Ketterer, Weir, Smethers, & Back, 2004).

Convergence becomes attractive to media managers and those taking an active role in the gathering of news because it allows wider coverage of a geographic area and permits cross-marketing of a single product in addition to satisfying consumer demands and lifestyles (Quinn, 2005). For example, a newspaper may have bureaus stationed in parts of the viewing area a television station doesn't normally cover. This would allow management to have news from areas of the market it typically doesn't send a crew, possibly because of its distance. It can result in the newspaper gaining additional coverage on the television newscast. The LNP becomes attractive for similar reasons – it provides more content with fewer resources.

The LNP could also fall under another form of convergence known as “symbolic convergence” (Bormann, 1985). This is a three part structure that includes discovering the patterns of communication that indicate group consciousness, describing how and why this group consciousness changes, and explaining why people share in fantasies (Bormann, 1985; Cragan & Shields, 1992). Bormann's definition of “fantasy” refers to the shared interpretation of events that fulfills the group's need (p. 130). He suggests this is part of the decision making process and once it is fulfilled the real phase of work can begin (p. 231). In order for the LNP to operate effectively all parties must agree to take part in the daily conference call and actively participate on gathering content that can be shared within the group – resulting in a product that fulfills the group's need.

However, when an organization changes how the work place is run, whether it's an example of a traditional convergence model such as print and television or the new LNP model, when staff are asked to do more with less there can be a struggle within the organization. Deuze (2004) finds that organizational struggle in staff trying to find a balance among the print, online, and broadcast and being able to work together. Journalists in the study found the convergence process to benefit both companies as long as they didn't perceive the change as being forced on them. Other studies (Singer, 2004) found journalists were intimidated by the tools needed to create content in different formats and felt that given just a little guidance and explanation, they could master those tools. Journalists emphasized the value lay not in providing the same story three times but rather in the ability to enhance a story's scope and impact by capitalizing on each medium's unique attributes (Singer, 2006).

In order to better understand how the convergence model of the LNP is formed one must look at the organization which is typically characterized by a hierarchical division of labor, where managers are the "thinkers" and laborers are the "doers" (Senge, 1990). Employees develop highly specialized skills that increase performance and productivity, while management's job is to ensure the conditions exist for the organizational "machine" to run smoothly (Gade, 2004). However the culture of the organization also is a factor in determining whether it runs smoothly. Schneider, Brief and Guzzo (1996) believed if management changes the tangible things - such as practices, policies, and procedures that define daily life in the organization - work roles would be more satisfying. While this study examined corporations like AT&T, this model of



thought could be applied to a smaller setting such as a newsroom because in the broader picture television stations are often owned by large corporations.

George Pollard (1995) proposed that two “control centers” govern journalists in complex organizations: the profession and the organization. Each has its own values, which are sometimes at odds. He found journalists were more satisfied with their jobs if they had more autonomy, authority, and control over their work - hallmarks of what he characterized as “professional” control. However when it comes to the LNP, the control aspect could be lacking for some positions that are required to work with the competition to provide shared content. Other studies have discovered over the past two decades newspaper organizations have become more horizontal and less vertical or “flattened” - where most of the work is done by self-directed teams (Gade, 2004). This research found that teams empower newspaper employees by giving them more decision-making authority and eliminating vertical chains of command. What is lacking from this research is the aspect of teams within competing organizations and the impact it can have on workers. The LNP could be viewed as a team effort since each organization is working to provide content for each partner within the group.

This team effort may be a direct result of an organization’s desire to monitor the competition, thus reducing the uncertainty of what the other organization is focusing on (Lowrey, 2010). Because the LNP is becoming more commonplace among news organizations (Papper, 2010), some researchers propose that when uncertainty is perceived as less overwhelming, managers may be more likely to view the environment as knowable and seek new ideas and practices (Lowrey, 2011). While the LNP does not

provide a broad picture of what other news stations are covering for their entire newscast, it does give a small snapshot of what stories are being provided for the group.

This notion also requires management to share power, which Randolph (2000) found misses the essential point that employees already have a great amount of power with their knowledge, experience, and motivation. He believes employees require a cultural shift within the company and must realize they are held more accountable than in traditional organizations (Randolph, 2000).

This team approach in organizations also may mean tackling more than one job or role at a given time. In the case of the LNP that often means the assignment editors take on the responsibility of managing the daily LNP stories, producers rely on the competition for content, and photographers must be aware the content they are shooting is for the LNP so they gather enough elements in the event a station wants to run a vo/sot instead of a vo. Previous research has found within this team approach editors are increasingly taking on marketing duties, working in cross-departmental teams with advertising, circulation, and marketing directors to create strategies to attract readers, often in specific demographic groups that advertisers are willing to pay to reach (Gade, 2004). Rank and file journalists are expected to accept restructuring, redefined news values, and a greater sensitivity to marketing as part of a larger cultural change process that is redefining their jobs and norms as journalists (Gade, 2004).

However the unique partnership of the LNP is missing from the literature and may add a new definition to the traditional view of the organization and how it is run.

RQ 5 asks, what effect does the LNP have on the workers within the organization?

Instead of having managers within one organization leading the group – four managers from four separate organizations are making decisions that affect each station. Building on Gade’s research that demonstrates the redefining and restructuring of the newsroom, findings from this study could provide additional insight into the organizational literature on cooperative partnerships and its effects on the workers within the organization. This study will specifically look at the roles of the assignment editor, producer, and photographer within the organization and how the LNP has affected their day to day operation within the newsroom. Because each of these job positions have been assigned to work on the LNP, it’s important to analyze the impact of this convergence model in order to better define the changes to the organization.

### **HOMOGENIZATION OF NEWS**

The potential negative impact from the LNP comes in the form of homogenized newscasts due to stations using the cooperative agreement as a way to save money, cut staff, and in-turn rely on the competition to supply a portion of its news. In a written submission to the Federal Communications Commission, news directors argued the events being covered under the LNP agreement are official events such as press conferences and court hearings that do not require multiple cameras to capture almost identical feeds. The Project for Excellence in Journalism (2010) studied this trend of

television stations forming this partnership and found the result of pooling video is leading to the official version of events becoming more important.

That may be a direct result of the lack of inquiry into a story. Geisler (2009) found that by cutting newsroom staff as a way to save money and in turn pooling resources with a competing television station, many were putting themselves at a disadvantage. He lists six “potential hazards” of pooling; stations may miss contacts and stories in the halls of power because pool crews don’t have the time or motivation to make contacts, develop sources, and find additional stories. Second, pool video may become devalued because staff may think if the story is part of the pool it’s not as big of a deal as a story being covered by their own station. Third, staged events may increase as a result of public relations firms learning how to work the news sharing environment. Fourth, pool coverage may become stenography due to the pool crew only gathering a small amount of video and interviews, resulting in the story for the viewers becoming the “who, what and where” instead of the more crucial “why and how”. Not to mention each station having to trust the station assigned to shoot the story is providing the pool with all of the elements that were gathered for the story. Fifth, pooling might save money, but not jobs since managers may be tempted to see the pool arrangement as “outsourcing” and an excuse to cut jobs. And finally the non-pool players may escape all of these hazards at the pool stations expense. This is due to the fact that some stations opt not to take part in the pool arraignment. Papper (2010) found that ABC affiliates and those who are number one in the market often opt out of the LNP.

Those six potential hazards have a direct impact not only on how the story is told but what stories are selected. Lee (2007) studied the agendas between traditional media and bloggers and found both news sources have similar agendas and as a result both created a similar product. This finding could be shared with the LNP since each station has a similar agenda to cover press conferences and court hearings, it becomes an accepted part of what is news for the stations. In addition Shoemaker and Reese (1996) find that news stations validate their decisions on what is news based on what their competition is doing. Donsbach (2004) calls these decisions a “shared reality”. He found achieving this shared reality requires a cooperative social activity, consensually validated social roles, and a cooperative relationship to form a mutual decision.

On the other hand, Ryfe (2006) found a set of organization rules, constitutive and regulative, explain why the news media produce news in the same way. Constitutive rules of journalism concern being professional but do not say anything about content, giving journalists a great deal of leeway in deciding what counts as legitimate journalism. Second, regulative rules state that any type of news can be deemed appropriate if others accept it as legitimate. While stations involved in the LNP often do have a set of rules concerning what can and cannot be covered under the agreement, Ryfe’s rules account for the fact that the LNP can be viewed as “legitimate journalism” despite it coming from a competing source. Groshek (2008) explains the decisions of similar news being shown between the television and online as a result of journalists being socialized into that type of news coverage. If in fact the LNP sticks around long enough it could become a socialized and widely accepted part of the news cycle.

While there is no study to date that has performed a content analysis on a newscast to determine if news content from the LNP is homogenized across all stations within a given market, there have been many concerns. The Communication Workers of America (2010) argues that it undermines the FCC's long standing public interest goals of diversity, competition, and localism. In fact long before the LNP was instituted the Hutchins Commission in 1947 issued a report calling on the media to consider the overall needs of society when making news decisions. Social Responsibility Theory was established as a result, proposing that the media elevate society's standards or risk being regulated by the government. Now it appears the LNP falls into a gray area concerning the media's social responsibility and their determination to save money. While its purpose is to provide additional news for each station, it may not be delivering the most objective report due to the fact that each station is being fed the same information. In addition, the audience is left in the dark because the video and sound-bites displayed on the television screen do not identify a story as being shot by another station or part of the LNP.

The FCC's Future of Media Report (2010) found that sharing footage can erode the depth and substance of local television news and "by sharing footage from official events as well as interviews, stories on three different stations might feature the same newsmaker interview". This could have a profound impact on the way the public agenda is shaped for communities. Stearns and Wright (2011) found local television news is an important journalistic player in a community accounting for a third of all original news content provided to viewers. If Tuchman (1978) is right and news is "an institution that

recognizes the items of importance to define aspects of social life which are important to citizens,” the LNP could be a downfall for both the media and the public. While Tuchman doesn’t believe that news is in essence “mirroring society”, it helps form a shared social phenomenon. If in fact the LNP is creating similar news among stations within the same market it is not only limiting a station’s ability to provide viewers with potentially important information, it’s hindering the overall goal of journalism which is to uncover elements in a story that might be important for the wider population.

Findings from these studies results in RQ 6a, do news workers believe the LNP affects news homogenization? And RQ 6b, does the LNP affect news homogenization? These two research questions have been split to allow for the first one to be analyzed through depth interviews and the second by a content analysis.

With the assignment editors from each station making a group consensus on what should be covered by the LNP, it validates their news judgment without having to wait to see what comes on the 6 p.m. newscast. While a long-term content analysis would be needed to determine news homogenization, this study will utilize depth interviews to provide descriptive results from the newsmakers to determine if they believe news is becoming homogenized as a result of the LNP. In addition, the content analysis conducted in this study could demonstrate in the short term how frequently each station is airing a similar story provided under the LNP. Findings from this question could add to the literature on news homogenization because most studies to date have analyzed stations on an individual basis and not through content sharing such as the LNP. In

addition these findings are important to discover as more news outlets opt to take part in similar convergence models to the LNP. Discovering the impact now could result in shifts in the way the LNP is presented to news consumers.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Empirical Studies**

#### **THE NEWSPAPER PRESERVATION ACT**

While it may be hard to predict the future of the LNP and the effect it could have on the television news industry after fewer than five years of development and implementation, one could look to the long history, prior and post, of the Newspaper Preservation Act or NPA. Created in 1970 by Congress and signed into law by President Richard Nixon, the act allows newspapers to enter into a joint operating agreement known as a JOA. Here competing newspaper companies can share the costs of production, business, and circulation operations while maintaining separate, competing newsrooms (Rogers, Hallock, Gennaria, & Fei, 2004). However JOA's began long before lawmakers took action.

Similar to the LNP starting during the economic downturn in 2009, the JOA started during the Great Depression. Newspapers across the country banded together to form cooperative agreements to pool business resources and engage in anti-competitive practices in an effort to save money. One of the first was in 1933 in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and over the next 30 years an additional twenty cities engaged in some form of a JOA (Martin, 2008). It wasn't until 1969 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled these joint operating agreements were illegal under anti-trust laws (Rogers, et al, 2004). At that time a total of 28 cities with two newspapers were taking part in JOA's, as of 2010 that number has dropped to 6 (Romeo & Canes, 2010). Researchers found this drop can be

attributed to the agreement between the two papers running out and when the agreement expires the weaker partner can't survive and simply goes out of business (Farhi, 1999).

While the total number of newspapers taking part in a JOA both prior and post to the NPA is only a fraction of the 1,400 dailies across the United States (Kirchhoff, 2010) the partnership is significant when analyzing the possible implications of the LNP.

Currently oversight for the television news industry comes from the Federal Communications Commission known as the FCC. But in order for the LNP to operate no FCC oversight is required because there is no change in ownership or control of the stations. In 2010 the Communications Works of America issued a statement to the FCC claiming the LNP undermined the long standing goals of the FCC to preserve diversity, localism, and competition among local television stations. The letter called on the FCC to “tighten up the rules for attributing local marketing agreements and joint service agreements” and urged the commission to “revise reporting and disclosure requirements so both the commission and the public know about these agreements and can better assess their efforts on diversity, competition, and localism” (Waldman, 2010, p. 98-99).

Prior to the NPA, the JOA often resulted in one newspaper taking over the weaker one, creating a monopoly in the market. Research has found these monopolies contributed to a wilting of editorial diversity that resulted in the public having less access to being informed about the world (Vermeer, 1995). Other studies found the amount of local news coverage declined after competition disappeared in a market and increased when competition was present – requiring staff to increase the amount of news to differentiate itself from the competition (Johnson & Wanta, 1993; Lacy, Coulson & Cyr,

1999). In recent years the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, *Rocky Mountain News*, and *Tucson Citizen* papers that were part of joint operating agreements recently closed, declared bankruptcy, or moved to Web-only production (Kirchhoff, 2010). While the LNP is not formed in an effort to share resources such as business costs like the JOA, it does share content. This content is the key component of news coverage which leads to ratings and advertiser dollars. While content produced through the LNP may currently only encompass a small portion of the overall newscast there is no telling how much it could grow as stations continue to enter into these partnerships and find benefit in converging with the competition.

An important point to make concerning the JOA's is that no daily newspaper has ever been founded or emerged as a competitor in a market where this partnership is taking place (Lacy, 1999). A goal of the NPA was to maintain competition among newspapers across the United States but research finds it may have become one of the most effective weapons in creating newspaper monopolies while performing an end-run on antitrust laws (Martin, 2008). A key component missing from the guidelines include ways to terminate the agreements allowing newspaper owners to manipulate and in some cases eliminate competitors for financial gain (Adams, 1996). An example of a JOA termination without government intervention occurred in Pittsburgh in 1992 when the *Pittsburgh Press* was sold to JOA member the *Post-Gazette* effectively monopolizing the daily newspaper market in Pittsburgh (Fraser, 1999). Researchers have argued this example demonstrates the failure of the NPA by allowing newspaper owners to converge papers through whatever means necessary to achieve a more fiscally profitable monopoly

(Martin, 2008). These types of monopolies often lead to fewer competitors in the market thus reducing differentiation and focus on producing products that appeal to the widest range of consumers (Becker, Hollifield, Jacobsson, Jacobsson, & Vlad, 2009).

When ones looks at the JOA's 80 year history it could be argued that with or without oversight these joint ventures, which were formed in an effort to reduce costs for the newspaper, were often unable to preserve competition within a market. While LNP markets call their efforts a cost savings by hiring fewer staff members to cover the daily news content while preserving competition, as years go on and if profits show promise based on this collaborative venture it could be predicted that additional converged news gathering methods may be employed. The JOA has a long history because it was successful in what it was trying to accomplish and as time passed other organizations created these same partnerships to reap the financial benefits. Overtime that partnership grew and changed to the point where the government had to step in. The LNP could have the potential to follow the path of the JOA if it continues to develop beyond its current arrangement of sharing content each station considers non-competitive, meaning each organization would have knowledge about the event from a press release or phone call.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Methodology**

#### **RATIONALE FOR MIXED METHODS APPROACH**

Mixed methods research is the collection, analysis and interpretation of both quantitative and qualitative data within a study (Creswell, 2009). A quantitative and qualitative approach was chosen for this study in order to add more validity and reliability to the depth interviews and content analysis of the LNP. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) describe validity as dealing with “the truth value of observations and whether a research instrument is accurately reporting the nature of the object of study.” They describe reliability as dealing with the “consistency of observations...whether the research instrument is a questionnaire, experimental text, or human observer – they will yield the same results every time it is applied”.

Overtime social science researchers have encouraged a mixed methods approach because it permits the researcher to reject with greater confidence the possibility that “evidence is artifactual” (Iyengar, 1991). McQuil (1992, p. 98) finds that many of the problems posed call for qualitative research methods and multiple approaches to the same problem. Due to the fact there is little to no prior research on the LNP, researchers have encouraged a qualitative method and often mixed method of inquiry to explore emergent and ill-defined topics (Patton, 1990). Creswell (2009) finds this approach as a way for qualitative work to fill in the gap of quantitative research allowing one to capture a greater picture of the social phenomena. Hesse-Biber (2010) found that the qualitative

data's job is to illustrate quantitative results in order to build a more robust quantitative measure such as survey research questions.

While mixed methods have been utilized within research for some time, it has mainly been found within education, science, and health studies. Now with the emergence of the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* in 2007, it has recognized this method as a third major research approach. However Green (2007) argues that the method cannot truly encompass both qualitative and quantitative research wholly. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003, p. 11) find that while mixed methods studies use both types of data for collection and analysis, they are often marginally mixed in that they are frequently either qualitative or quantitative in the type of inferences they make at the end of the studies. While this research on the LNP leans more towards qualitative methods with the depth interviews, the content analysis that will be analyzed quantitatively, adding to the overall qualitative descriptive results of this research. By combining these methods the goal of this research is for each to lend complementary support to the explanation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 241).

## **STUDY 1**

### **DEPTH INTERVIEW RATIONALE AND PROCEDURE**

In order to gain an overall perspective on how the LNP functions for the various people who take part in the process on a daily basis, depth interviews were conducted with the assignment editors, news photographers, and producers from NBC, ABC, and FOX affiliates in the Austin, Texas, television markets as well the NBC and ABC

affiliates in Denver, Colorado, and the ABC and CBS affiliates in Tampa, Florida. In Austin the CBS affiliate elected not to take part, in Denver the CBS and FOX affiliates declined to be a part of the study, and in Tampa the NBC and FOX affiliates declined. Overall these markets were selected due to their involvement in the LNP since its inception in 2009, the incorporation of various market sizes, and the researcher's relationship with various workers in those markets, making access to potential interviewees easier.

Depth interviews are a common tool used to gain insight on a person's "experience and perspective through stories, accounts, and explanations" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 173). Becker and Vlad (2008) describe depth interviews as a way researchers can understand the construction of news and not just observe the end product. Depth interviews are utilized in this study as a technique to gather information about "things or processes that cannot be observed effectively by other means" (Lindlof & Taylor, p. 174) such as a content analysis. The goal being to find a "novelty or uniqueness" in the person being interviewed that cannot be derived from other types of methods, such as surveys (Poindexter & McCombs, 2000, p. 269). The one-on-one interview also allows the researcher to develop a rapport with the participant allowing the person to be more willing to open up (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003).

In order to answer RQ's 1; How does the LNP affect the Gatekeeping theory process? RQ 3: What effect does a cooperative relationship have on newsroom routines within the hierarchy of influences? RQ 4: How does the level of participation affect the LNP partners? RQ 5: What effect does the LNP have on the workers within the

organization? And RQ 6a: Do news workers believe the LNP affects news homogenization? - a total of 31 broadcast journalists took part in the study, seven assignment editors, seven news photographers, and seven producers. Previous research on data saturation found 20 interviews to be a fair representation in order to show the basic themes (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The participants for the depth interviews were selected based on job role within the newsroom setting. Glasser and Strauss (1967) found choosing participants based on their experience, ability to reflect, and ability to articulate the information solicited provides the most beneficial depth interviews. Appendix A details the participant's profile.

Each participant was sent an e-mail asking to take part in the research (see Appendix B). A total of 36 e-mails were sent in January asking participants for a face-to-face interview if they lived within the Austin, Texas, television market or an online or phone interview for those outside of the area – 21 participants accepted the invitation. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and were recorded and transcribed shortly after. While there are 39 scripted questions (See Appendix C for Interview Guide) the interview process allowed for exploration off the script to give each subject the freedom to describe any problems, likes or dislikes concerning the functions of converging with the competition. Approval was received from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Texas-Austin prior to conducting the interviews and each participant acknowledged they knew they were being recorded for a study during the interview.

The interview questions allowed the study to create a profile of the journalists taking part by asking their job title, the market size in which they worked, and how long



they have been in the news business. These are important factors because Papper (2010) found market size can impact participation in the LNP. In addition, those who have worked longer in the news business are more likely to be in a bigger market. Other questions led to a better understanding of the LNP within the participants' market. Questions include; how long has the LNP been utilized within your market? What affiliate do you work for? How many network affiliates are in your market? And finally what is your station ranked within the market? Previous research found those that were number one in the market or worked for an ABC affiliate did not take part in the LNP (Malone, 2009; Papper, 2010).

To answer RQ 1, how does the LNP affect the Gatekeeping theory process, five questions are asked: What is the purpose of having an LNP in your market? How does your station decide which stories should be part of the daily LNP? What types of stories are typically considered for the LNP? Are there official rules between the stations on how the LNP should operate? If so, who created the rules? Findings from these questions could build onto the body of gatekeeping literature adding a new aspect to gatekeeping theory where competing organizations make a group decision on what is news.

Five interview questions helped answer RQ 3, what effect does a cooperative relationship have on newsroom routines within the hierarchy of influences? Questions include: When you consider the overall process of gathering the story for the LNP, how many hours do you spend per day working on it? What do you think of the LNP as a method for gathering news? How has working on the LNP changed your daily routine of news gathering? Do you think the LNP is good way for your station to gather a portion

of its daily news content? And finally, why? Findings from these questions could add to Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) hierarchy of influences model to include the routines of news workers under the constraints of converging with the competition to share content. Findings from this study aim to determine if the patterned sets of expectations and constraints change when competing news organizations form a cooperative relationship in an effort to create a shared news product.

In order to answer RQ 4, how does the level of participation affect the LNP partners, eight interview questions were asked: Who is in charge of running your station's LNP on a daily basis? How many days per week does the LNP take place? What does your station typically share under the LNP agreement? While everyday is different in the news business, on average how many stories does your station shoot per day for the LNP? Out of the stories that are shot by each station, on average how many LNP stories does your station air per day? Has your station ever shared spot news or other items that do not fall under the "official rules" for the LNP? Is your station ever willing to share content with a competing station in an effort that station will help you in the future? For example, your station was able to shoot a car accident that a competing affiliate missed. And finally, would you be willing to share it in the hope they would provide similar content for your station in the future? Findings from these questions could add onto Higgins (1998) research that shows the negotiation of power is not equal. While the LNP is designed to create an equal playing field for participates where each station is given the same content, this study could likely find that is not the case.

Six questions were utilized to answer RQ 5 about the effect the LNP has on the workers within the organization: Has the LNP created additional work for you? If so, how? All things considered, how has the LNP affected your ability to produce and gather news? Please describe how it has affected your job. The LNP is described as a cost savings method to gathering news: how are those cost savings invested at your station? One critique of the LNP is by sending one photographer for the group a station could potentially miss additional stories or interviews because they are not present to gather it or look for those elements: how much of a concern is this for you? Findings from these questions could build on Gade's (2004) research that demonstrates the redefining and restructuring of the newsroom. This study could provide additional insight into the organizational literature on cooperative partnerships and its effects on the workers within the organization.

To answer RQ 6a, do news workers believe the LNP affects news homogenization, six interview questions were asked: One purpose of the LNP is to allow for more enterprise reporting. Do you feel your station's enterprise reporting has changed as a result of the LNP? One critique of the LNP is the audience is not aware that the video and interviews they are seeing have been shot by a competing station. Do you think the video aired from the pool agreement should be labeled as such so the public is aware? Why? Do you agree or disagree with the following comment: One concern about the LNP is by sharing content each station will have a similar story. And finally, how does your station set itself apart from the others when sharing content such as video and sound bites? Findings from these questions could add onto Ryfe's (2006) study that

found a set of organizational rules, constitutive and regulative, explain why the news media produce news in the same way. If the LNP is found to have its own set of rules, this may add to the research concerning homogenization. In addition findings could add to Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) research that shows news stations validate their decisions on what is news based on what their competition is doing. By the LNP allowing each station to acquire knowledge of what some stations plan to air, others may choose to do the same based on that knowledge.

In addition to interviews I also observed and listened in on the daily conference call among the assignment editors in the Austin, Texas, market to gain perspective of how the organizations handle the daily LNP assignments. This market was selected for reasons of access to the organization. Detailed field notes were taken during this observation period to enhance my grounded understanding of the events taking place. These notes became an important tool because without them work can "fade from memory and is invalidated as a resource for research claims" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 160). In addition Lindlof and Taylor (2002) find that the combination of interviews and field notes can complement one another (p. 175).

And finally, I collected the daily e-mails issued between the assignments editors in the Austin, Texas, market to gain an inside look into the ongoing communication process concerning the LNP. This communication allowed for greater understanding into the competition between stations and to look for the outlier. Gladwell (2008) defines the outlier as "something that is situated or classed differently from a main or related body."

The goal with analyzing the e-mail communication was to look for incidents where the rules defining the LNP are broken and discovering the meaning behind it.

These three components allowed for a greater understanding of the gatekeeping role within this cooperative partnership. The depth interviews and observation allowed me to analyze the routines of the news workers and to have a more grounded understanding of the affects the LNP has on those within the organization. My goal is to define how this fits within the hierarchy of influences and if the negotiation of power has an impact on it.

#### **DEPTH INTERVIEW ANALYSIS**

Following transcription, each interview was coded in order to search for commonalities and differences among those taking part in the study. For example, if any interviewee said, “the files for the video are too large and take hours to upload”, this particular phrase was coded as “FTP Issues”. Other codes dealt with story selection, the function of the LNP, and reliability.

This research utilized Strauss’ (1987) method of “open coding”. This style allows the researcher to go through the texts line by line and mark chunks of text that suggest a category. In order to make those categories more manageable Glaser’s (1978) method of focused coding was employed to generate a smaller more manageable representation of the data. Glaser and Straus (1967) refer to this procedure as “core categories”. This allows for examination into some categories possibly being connected to other categories, leading to a more signified event or relationship within the process. This does not mean

data is thrown away but rather “reduced to put the researcher in touch with only those parts of the material that count toward his or her claims” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 211). Lindlof and Taylor (2002) refer to this as “data management”.

One of the major pitfalls to this type of analysis are the findings from the study are not generalizable to the population being studied (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). This may be due to validity being difficult to prove in qualitative research because the paradigm of multiple, constructed social realities into a single representation cannot serve as a criterion for an accurate measurement (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 240). In addition bias is also a concern. Unbeknownst to the interviewers they may unintentionally signal their attitudes on the subject which can in turn affect the validity of the responses (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003).

## **STUDY 2**

### **CONTENT ANALYSIS PROCEDURE**

This study used a census of newscasts during a two week period in November and December of 2011 to answer RQ 2: What is the most common type of LNP story used in a newscast? And provide additional context to RQ 4: How does the level of participation affect the LNP partners? And RQ 6b: Does the LNP affects news homogenization? November was selected due to it being a ratings period, which means each station is fully staffed, taking away the possibility of the LNP not taking place due to a shortage of workers because of vacation. December was selected for the exact opposite reason. Staff can take vacation and the LNP may not function fully due to fewer workers being

available to shoot for the LNP. Analysis for this portion of the study involved four of the five television stations in the Austin, Texas, area. The fifth station, a Time Warner Cable 24 hours-a-day news outlet, opted not to take part in the LNP when it first began in 2009. This section of the country was selected because it established a local news pool around the same time as other stations across the country (Malone, 2009).

In order to perform the content analysis the newscasts of KXAN (NBC), KVUE (ABC), KEYE (CBS), and KTBC (FOX) were recorded during a one month period. The 5 p.m., 6 p.m., 9p.m. (the FOX station only because this is their late news time slot) and 10 p.m. newscasts were selected for this study because the majority of the LNP shoots take place during the day and are used for those evening newscasts. A list of each story selected for the LNP and the station assigned to shoot the story were acquired for each week, Monday thru Friday, during this one-month period to provide an accurate list of which news stories to analyze.

Each story was coded for the station that shot the event, which station used the LNP story within their broadcast, how it was presented, i.e. VO (voice over, approximately 20 seconds in length), vo/sot (voice over with a sound bite, approximately 45 seconds in length), or package (news package which is a combination of a reporter voice over with sound bites, approximately one minute thirty seconds in length), and the type of story, i.e. police, fire, crime, spot news, court, consumer, military, rally, feature, sports, health, education, government, travel, transportation, or other. For example police was classified as an event dealing with the department such as an officer being honored. Fire was classified as an event where the fire department is taking part in an activity like

training. Crime dealt with any report on the act of a crime taking place like a robbery. Spot news concerned events such as car accidents, fires, and drowning. Court covered any story taking place at the courthouse that concerns actions within a courtroom. Consumer was classified as stories concerning products, business, and recalls. Military concerned any event or story about all branches of the military. Rally covered any type of event that is called a rally within the copy or is listed as such on the LNP list. Feature was any type of event that is viewed as a ribbon cutting, ground breaking, or positively framed story not found within the other categories. Sports covered any type of sporting event. Health dealt with any medical related story like a new drug, health conference, or a medical study. Education concerned any type of story dealing with schools, teachers, and administrators. Government was classified as anything dealing with politics, the State Capitol, or the election. Travel looked at stories dealing with the airport and vacation related news. Transportation concerned any stories that deal with the roads, trains, or any forms of mass transit. Any type of story that may have crossed over into two categories was coded for how the story was framed by the news station. For example, if a crime occurred at a rally it was coded as a “crime” due to the station covering the story because a crime took place. And finally the content analysis coded for the newscast in which the LNP story was found (See Appendix D for the codebook). These categories were created by the researcher after viewing previous LNP lists. By utilizing these codes the goal was to discover if a certain type of story is dominating the LNP, what stories are most likely to air on all four networks, and if there is a connection



between the television station's participation in the shoot and if it is more or less likely to air the story.

While scholars have conceptualized news stories in different ways with articles (Husselbee & Elliot, 2002) or visual features (King & Lester, 2005), this research followed Berkowitz's (1990) coding when he identified themes within a local newscast. For example, when he analyzed "planned events" verses "unplanned events" within a newscast he included items such as accidents, disasters, and crimes into "unplanned events".

The initial coding was done by the researcher and story types were defined within a codebook. The codes identified are the linkages between the data and the categories posited by the researcher (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 216). Two additional coders were brought in and used the codebook as groundwork for analysis. During pretesting the intercoder reliability among the two coders ranged between 87.5 and 100 percent (Scott's  $\pi$ , .89)<sup>1</sup> which exceeds the minimum acceptable level of 80 percent (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998).

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<sup>1</sup>

Variables	Percentage of Agreement	Scott's $\pi$
Variable 1	100	1
Variable 2	87.5	.835
Variable 3	87.5	.848
Variable 4	87.5	.831
Variable 5	100	1
Variable 6	87.5	.823

Because it is possible for stations to repeat the same story within several newscasts on the same day, coders were instructed to analyze the first time a story aired whether that was the 5 p.m., 6 p.m., 9 p.m. (FOX only) or 10 p.m. For example if the coder watched the 6 p.m. newscast first and observed a VO or voice over of an LNP shoot but later observed a package in the 5 p.m. newscast, the coder was instructed to code what was observed first which was a VO in this case.

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data that was collected and coded. Data analysis included frequencies and cross tabulations which are appropriate when analyzing census data. These figures helped determine how the frame of the story relates to its frequency of use. For example, if each station is utilizing the same feature story and each is providing a VO (voice over) that could be interpreted as lacking importance due to its length. Previous research (Soloski, 1989) found the length of the news story is a method to maximize audience size and maintain firm control over the marketplace. However, providing the same story could contribute to the homogenization of news. This research would be different from previous studies since it is analyzing shared content.

# **RESULTS**

## **Chapter Six**

### **Study 1 - Depth Interviews**

Results from study 1 have been generated by two methods. In the Austin, Texas, television market depth interviews were conducted with the assignment editors, producers, and photographers from the NBC, ABC, and FOX affiliates. The CBS affiliate opted not to take part in the study. In addition, the daily conference call for this market was observed during a two month time period. Depth interviews were conducted with assignment editors, producers, and photographers from the NBC and ABC affiliates in Denver and the ABC and CBS affiliates in Tampa. The other affiliates opted not to take part in this study. A total of 21 news-workers took part in the study including seven assignment editors, seven producers, and seven photographers. This section of the study will answer the following research questions;

- RQ1 – how does the LNP affect the gatekeeping theory process?
- RQ3 – what effect does the cooperative relationship have on newsroom routines within the levels of the hierarchy of influences model?
- RQ4 – how does the level of participation affect the LNP partners?
- RQ 5 – what effect does the LNP have on the workers within the organization?
- RQ 6 – do news workers believe the LNP affects news homogenization?

To begin this section of the study it's important to start with an in-depth description of how each market conducts its local news pool to provide a grounded understanding of its purpose and function.

#### **AUSTIN, TEXAS - "THE LOCAL NEWS POOL" OR "LNP"**

At 8:30 a.m. Monday through Friday the conference call begins with the four assignment editors from the four network affiliates in the Austin, Texas, television market. Prior to that day's call the assignment editor at the NBC affiliate has compiled a list of story ideas that the stations could share on this given day for the "Local News Pool" or "LNP" as it's called. The stories selected are based on press releases that he believes each station has received and story types that would be considered non-competitive material such as features, consumer, and health stories. The goal is for the story not to give one station a ratings advantage over the other. This has stayed consistent since the local news pool started in 2009 in an effort to produce more news with fewer resources. Out of the three news markets studied this was the only one without a helicopter. The idea is that by sending one photographer for the group to cover a press conference the other photographers can work with reporters on enterprise related stories in an effort to set their station apart from the others. The LNP only operates during the day shift and all stories must occur prior to 1 p.m. in order to arrive at the competing stations before their newscasts. While assignment editors state there are "official rules" to the LNP that the news directors created, no one reported seeing it written down and operated it according to their bosses initial instructions.

During the conference call the line is silent until each assignment editor comes on. The first question is always by the NBC assignment editor,

“Does anyone have anything to add to the list?”

On occasion others chime in that they have an additional story, but many times this three-minute-or-less phone call involves someone from each station stating which story they could send a photographer to cover for the group. Many times only two or three stations assign themselves to a story. In addition there’s no obligation to shoot a story for the group but, regardless if a station participates, they are still offered the same video and sound bites the other stations receive.

The overall tone of this conversation demonstrates a level of cooperation among the group. The most cooperative often is the CBS affiliate, which is also the lowest rated station in the Austin market. The assignment editor is the most cordial on the conference call and is consistently willing to pick up a story if it will “help out the group.”

Meanwhile, the assignment editor with the ABC affiliate, the number one station, often is very short during the conversation and typically states they will shoot a story because that’s what “they are interested in for their newscast.” In between both these extremes lie the NBC and FOX affiliate assignment editors who are willing to help out the group but often take a more neutral approach and state which story they can provide for the group because they can “pick it up” – meaning they don’t necessarily need it for their newscast but are willing to help the group. While there is a friendly level of cooperation, the ABC affiliate makes it obvious by the tone in the assignment editor’s voice that he and possibly his station are not excited to be a part of the daily process of sharing content.

When the conference call is complete an e-mail is sent that restates each stations assignment for the day. The official rules for the local news pool require each station to shoot enough video and sound bites to provide a vo/sot or a 45 second story. All of the content that is shot is then fed to the other stations unedited through an FTP site and must get to those stations prior to their evening newscasts. The one stipulation to the official rules deals with other events that may occur outside of the assigned pool story. For example, if the station assigned to shoot the mayor's press conference learns of a shooting taking place outside of city hall and they are there first to get the video, that content is not part of the pool coverage. Because the shooting happened outside of the assigned pool event the station is able to keep that footage for itself.

The second exception to the rules deals with spot news such as car accidents, fires, and bank robberies. While these stories do not come up during the morning conference call, many times because they haven't occurred yet, it has become commonplace for an assignment editor to send an e-mail to the group asking if someone can go to a spot news event or share it with the group because they don't have the resources to go at that time. Sometimes that e-mail request goes unanswered by others, but on occasion a competing station is willing to pool the content. One assignment editor explained it as a way to help out the competition on a spot news event they feel lacks importance and in the future that favor could be returned.

But regardless of what stories are shot for the LNP, the overall goal is to provide more content to the newscasts. Producers are responsible for writing the story that is shot for the LNP. They generally feel it is good "filler" content but state they only use about

50 percent of the stories and will drop them from the newscast if they need additional time due to the weather report running long. One of the biggest complaints concerns a lack of time to write the LNP story. It's not unusual for the video and sound bites to appear on the FTP site in the late afternoon – leading to less time to write the story. In fact one 5 p.m. producer stated she often doesn't include LNP stories in her show because the content is still uploading to the site. When that content is used, producers conveyed they try to listen to the entire press conference or the interviews to understand what occurred at the event, but when time is short they would write the story from the information provided on the press release.

#### **DENVER, COLORADO - “THE POOL”**

“The Pool” as it's called in Denver, Colorado, started in 2009 in an effort to allow stations more opportunities for enterprise reporting. As stations created additional newscasts they needed to do more with less and that's when managers at the NBC, ABC, CBS, FOX, and Univision affiliates formed a cooperative partnership to start their own version of a local news pool. The pool operates Monday through Friday and because there are five stations in the group each one is assigned one day of the week to run the pool. The assignment editor in charge of the pool on their given day looks through their rundown of stories and selects ones they feel would be a press release style story or events each station would have knowledge about. An e-mail is sent to the group which includes both assignment editors and producers from the competing stations. Each station votes on which story they are most interested in and the majority wins. At 3

o'clock each afternoon the interviews and video in a raw format are fed via microwave signal to the competing stations.

When the pool began in 2009, three stories were selected from the daily rundown. But after the first year producers stated they were only using one story and the assignment editors determined it was a waste of time and resources to continue shooting three stories for the pool on a daily basis. Now that same list of stories is still generated and e-mailed to the group, but only one story is selected based on the majority of votes. That story is shot by the station assigned to cover the pool for the day. The official rules that many quote but have never seen written down require photographers to shoot enough video and sound bites to provide partner stations with enough content to produce a vo/sot or a story that is 45 seconds in length. Stations ask that the photographer not shoot more than 20 minutes of video due to the time it takes to feed and for the producer to log. In addition, photographers cannot conduct additional interviews for their station if for example they want more coverage of the event. All video and sound that is gathered must be shared – stations that desire additional coverage, even the one assigned to the pool event, must send a second crew.

Photographers take these rules very seriously and expect competing stations to shoot and provide high quality content. Denver, Colorado, is known for its photojournalism and any slacking by a competing station for pool content will receive a phone call from the news director to increase their standards. While many state this is rare – they are actively viewing what is provided by the competition and expect everyone to continue competing on the same level.



In addition to the pooling of video and interviews the stations also pool a single helicopter. The idea for having fewer helicopters in the air started in 2007 following the mid-air collision in Phoenix, Arizona. The concern was that air space became crowded when each station tried to get a similar shot of a car chase or fire. In 2009 when companies began examining their bottom line due to budget cuts, the one million dollar helicopter lease became a major money drain. As a result the stations in Denver agreed to lease a single helicopter from an independent source and split the cost. Instead of having a reporter in the helicopter providing commentary to the event occurring below, the anchor or reporter on the scene narrates the coverage during the newscast while the aerial shot is shown on screen.

When these pool arrangements first began there was a strong backlash by news workers who were concerned jobs would be cut. In addition, news workers at the number one station in Denver described “getting attitude” from their competition in e-mail exchanges concerning the selection of stories that could be shared. A producer said,

“It’s just the tone of the e-mails, it never appears to be friendly like we try to be.”

Those not working at the number one station describe the initial relationship as “cordial.”

An assignment editor said,

“Initially not everyone was sure how this whole Pool was going to operate and since we are very competitive in this new market I think you need to figure out how much you can trust the other stations to pull their weight.”

Workers also felt the Univision station was consistently late in feeding their content which often led to “headaches by the other stations” not knowing if the story would make it in time for the newscast.

Now three years into the pool agreement it is viewed by all three job roles as a positive method for gathering additional content for the newscasts. During this time there were no layoffs as a result of the pool agreement and workers within the organizations interviewed for this study reported that those involved in its daily process were all “on the same page” for how it should function. Assignment editors feel a lesser burden to shuffle their staff on days when the pool is not assigned to them, producers enjoy having the option for extra content which they call “filler” and “not the real important stories”, and photographers especially like the pool as a newsgathering method because they feel it allows for more time to work on an enterprise story with a reporter. They are no longer being called in the middle of their story to go and grab an additional vo/sot for the newscast – they can focus on a single task. A photographer said,

“I would say it’s a win-win for everyone involved. I have no complaints now.”

Workers also emphasize that if the story assigned to the pool becomes a bigger event then initially anticipated they are willing and able to send a second crew to provide adequate coverage of the event. While producers may call the pool stories “filler” material – they actively communicate with the assignment editor to make sure that remains the case prior to the newscast. The aspect of competition is always present in the minds of these news workers – and that is why breaking news is never shared in the pool

agreement. To date no one can recall ever breaking from the format of only suggesting feature style or press release stories for the pool to cover. An assignment editor said,

“Denver is an extremely competitive market and so breaking news is completely off the table when it comes to the pool....in fact I can’t think of a time when anyone has ever requested it. We just don’t.”

Still, cooperating with the competition is equally important when it comes to the pitching of stories for the pool and delivering the content on time. Assignment editors don’t want to be viewed as “slacking” if they can’t find more than one story for the pool to cover. In addition they have a desire to make the pool operate smoothly because others within the organization find the additional content helpful in producing a newscast and photographers are happier when they are not assigned additional stories four out of the five days per week. A photographer said,

“Having to pick up an extra vo/sot on most days is no longer a concern because we all know The Pool photographer will get it.”

#### **TAMPA, FLORIDA – “THE LOCAL NEWS SERVICE” OR “LNS”**

The “Local New Service” or “LNS” as it’s referred to is Tampa, Florida’s, name for its pool agreement between the ABC, FOX, and CBS affiliates which began in 2009. The NBC station opted not take part in this agreement due to its convergence model already in practice with a local newspaper and website. This pool sharing agreement operates seven days a week, 24 hours a day. When it first began only the ABC and FOX affiliates agreed to share content such as video and interviews Monday through Friday, but when the CBS affiliate decided to join station managers included the weekends for the LNS and CBS was assigned to cover both Saturday and Sunday. The stations also

went from each having their own helicopter to sharing a single helicopter that operates from 4 to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The arrangement is quite different from the other stations analyzed in this study. Each station has designated crews for the LNS. Unlike the other stations who utilize their general crews to assign and then cover the story, in Tampa there are three dedicated LNS assignment editors and at least two photographers who only shoot LNS stories. The FOX affiliate is in charge of LNS assignments during the day shift, ABC covers the evening and overnight stories which also include running the helicopter, and the CBS affiliate is in charge of the weekend. However, while the ABC affiliate covers the evening shift the photographers who work during that time are employed by the CBS affiliate. The LNS photographers for the day shift are employed by the FOX affiliate and the one overnight photographer is with the ABC affiliate.

During these designated shifts, the LNS assignment editor looks through the press release and feature stories and calls the partnering stations to learn if they are interested in any of the selected stories or if there is something else they would prefer. Once a list of ideas is compiled the assignment editor makes a second phone call, based on what the majority state they would like for their newscast those stories are chosen. Finally, an e-mail is sent to the assignment editors and producers at the partnering stations to confirm the stories that will be covered by the LNS that day.

The exception to this method occurs overnight. There is no assignment editor during the midnight to 7 a.m. shift so the photographer hired to work this schedule by the ABC affiliate prior to the LNS is the designated pool photographer during this time

period. He is responsible for listening to the scanners for car accidents or fires and tapes any spot news that may occur overnight. In addition he must call the other stations to find out if they want him to cover a specific incident he hears on the scanners. If the majority tells him to cover it he does, if not it goes uncovered. While a manager was not interviewed for this study, workers did not think it was unusual for one station to cover the cost of an overnight photographer that is shared among the group. Producers stated he was the only overnight photographer in the market and when the pool agreement was established as a 24/7 operation it was most cost effective to have him slide into that role. In fact producers found this arrangement helpful because if they missed hearing an incident over the scanners but the competition called the photographer to cover it, they are able to get the same content for their newscast. In essence they aren't missing something the competition may have that occurs overnight.

Regardless of the shift, stories assigned to the LNS are typically vo's or vo/sots. Photographers must shoot enough video and interviews for a 45 second story - the content is then fed via microwave signal to the partnering stations in a raw format to allow for individual content decisions. The exception often occurs for sporting events. A photographer said,

"If we have to feed three hours of video it will take forever! It's much easier on both ends to just send highlights. We all want the big touchdowns anyway."

While photographers assigned to the LNS often shoot between three to five feature stories throughout the day, breaking news has become a big part of the LNS. In fact the LNS assignment editors felt that stations often relied on them to cover the majority of "B

level” breaking news. That would include such things as car accidents, small fires, or bank robberies. An assignment editor said,

“These stories are not going to be the lead story that a reporter needs to be on. It’s something that would be good for the newscast but not essential.”

Producers and photographers found allowing the LNS photographers to cover some spot news helpful because it meant they didn’t have to pull their own crews from their current story to gather additional elements for the newscast. A producer said,

“When we have to pull a crew off a story to go and grab some spot news that may or may not turn into something I take a risk because I could in the end wind up with nothing.”

The overall purpose for having designated positions assigned just to the LNS is to allow for impartial decision making. As one assignment editor said, “You work for everybody and you work for nobody.” They are the mediator when it comes to what stories are assigned. Because their allegiance isn’t to the station that employs them but rather the process of collaborating with the partnering stations, their role is to provide the best coverage for the group. By allowing each station to cast a vote on what stories they feel are important for their newscast, the LNS assignment editor’s role becomes one of a mediator.

#### **GATEKEEPERS OF THE LOCAL NEWS POOL**

If there is one constant among the three organizations studied, the primary gatekeeper is the assignment editor in making the initial decision of what stories should be selected for the daily pool – much like White (1950) discovered in his own research that the editor of a newspaper went through a list of stories to decide which ones were

appropriate for his section and which ones were not, the assignment editors for the pool do much the same thing. RQ 1 asks, how does the LNP affect the gatekeeping theory process? This study found there is a multi-layer gatekeeping process within the LNP that starts with the assignment editor making the initial story decision, continues on with the photographer who captures the story, and finishes with the producer who writes it.

*Assignment editor* The first layer, the assignment editor, is unique in the fact it involves multiple decision makers from several organizations. This study found the gatekeepers' role is to find stories that are non-competitive, which often translate into features. As assignment editor 5 said, "This isn't stuff that is going to make or break news." In order to categorize these stories into ones that are appropriate for the LNP, assignment editors look through the day's press releases to determine if a story can be shared with the competition. The decision to include it on the LNP list is often based on the questions, did everyone receive the press release, is it within a reasonable driving distance, and does it occur during a time frame such as the morning so it can be fed in time to make the newscast? Assignment editor 6 said,

"First thing is coming in, seeing if we didn't have anything already planned running through my station night book, seeing if there were any things that would be obvious for us to pickup, calling around to say, 'Hey, what do you guys want us to do?' Sometimes they come in with a bunch of requests, sometimes they come in with nothing."

In addition this decision process is also based on the assignment editor's experience working in the news business and knowing what is considered a story pitch that all stations have received and what is not. For example, a press release that lists the who, what, when, and where is often considered something that has been e-mailed to all

news outlets verses a release directed just to the assignment editor and offers up important information that may not have been released to the competition. Assignment editor 1 explained the difference,

“If the pr company contacts me directly and we have a conversation or e-mail exchange about the story and they tell me we are getting first dibs then I know this is something I might want to keep just for us – otherwise 99.9 percent of the press releases can be considered for the LNP.”

Plus having a general idea of what the story could be about and what it could ultimately look like is important as well. Assignment editor 2 said,

“I can read a press release and know what kind of video and interviews can be captured and if that deems it appropriate for the pool.”

This shared knowledge base resulted in assignment editors being able to quickly decide if a story was appropriate for the LNP without seeking a managers approval and having little objection to the story choices provided by the other stations.

While spot news was often the outlier within this decision making process among the stations in Austin and Tampa, there was still a consensus by these competing gatekeepers on what would be an appropriate event to pool and that required a station to send its own crew. For example, if it was a small car accident on a back road the pool could be utilized but if it was a large accident on the interstate that had the potential to tie up traffic during rush hour it was viewed as a news event individual stations could and should handle on their own. This study found that gatekeepers often based their decision on asking for spot news to be shared on past events when a station volunteered to cover it for the group. Assignment editor 7 explained,



“This isn’t the big stuff like a plane crash – the spot news we’re talking about is something we’re all going to get the same shot of like a bank robbery. Since we all know it’s going to be the same video it seems like there’s a general agreement that yeah we can share that kind of stuff.”

*Photographer* The second layer in this decision process is made by the photographer assigned to cover the pool story. The photographer’s role is to collect enough video and interviews for news stations to create a vo/sot or a 45 second story. Typically stations ask the photographer not to capture more than 20 minutes of video due to the fact it takes time to feed the event and for those in Austin the FTP process can take hours. These requirements mean there’s a stipulation on the photographer to either collect more or fewer elements than they may deem appropriate, to gather it by a deadline that’s much earlier than a newscast deadline, and to shoot it to allow competing stations to choose how to edit the video and interviews for differing editorial decisions.

This study found photographers often viewed the stories assigned to the pool as less important news. During observation of the conference call a photographer walked by shortly after it was finished. The assignment editor told him he was assigned to the pool shoot for the day. When he heard the assignment he said, “Looks like I have the least important story of the day.” This does not mean they didn’t put their best efforts toward it but, it was awareness of the story being shared among the competition that led this group to believe it lacked in importance. Photographer 2 said,

“I believe all news stories are important, but if it’s something my station has agreed to share with the other stations in town that means we don’t put a lot of value into it being something we can pride ourselves on.”

There also is a lot of pressure on the photographers to capture the LNP story within a short time frame in order for it to be fed to the other stations. While time is always a factor in the news business, many photographers felt the LNP put additional pressure on them during busy days when they were assigned to work with a reporter. This often led to what was referred to as “spray it and leave.” That means a photographer sets up the camera, shoots as much video as they can in a short period of time, and goes onto the next story. This method often results in photographers spending little time observing the event and instead capturing what is right in front of them instead of looking for a possible deeper meaning to the story. Photographer 4 said his station doesn’t want him to look for anything extra:

“We don’t have to shoot anything extra outside of the pool shoot. No one-on-one interviews or anything like that. The photographers out in the field just have to gather the press release information.”

*Producer* The third and final layer in the gatekeeping process for the pool is the producer. While very few reported having a direct impact on the story selection for the LNP, they are the gatekeepers in charge of deciding if the story runs in the newscast, where it will be placed within the order of news stories, and how it will be written. This final layer may be considered one of the most important because producers are in charge of how a story is conveyed to the audience. Deciding if the LNP story airs in the newscast involves three questions – will the story be fed in enough time to write it, does the producer feel the story fits into that day’s newscast, and is there time in the show? Producer 1 said,

“The LNP story really is just something I can throw into my newscast if I need a kicker for the end of a block or maybe we’re low on our story count for the day because some of the photogs are out on other stuff or out sick.”

Because there is no rule that state producers have to run a pool story, they have the final determination. Due to the fact that many of the stories selected for the news pool occur at varying times and photographers assigned to shoot the pool item maybe assigned to other tasks, it can lead some stations to feed the video and interviews at different times of day. This causes producers to question if they should even include it in their newscast. Producer 2 said,

“If it gets to be almost 5 p.m. and the story is still not on the FTP site I have to drop it from my show because I won’t have time to write it and at that point I can’t count on it. I need to find something else that’s in house to fill that time slot.”

Many producers said the overall issue of a story being fed late led them to use about half of the stories selected for the LNP. The feed time also impacts their ability to write the story. If it was late getting to a station, producers reported writing it based on the press release and only listening to limited interviews in order to “just get a sound bite.” More time led to a more thorough examination of the video and interviews provided by the competition. When asked how they thought this might impact the viewer, producer 1 just threw her hands up in the air and said,

“There’s only so much I can do. If it’s late and I need it in my newscast I write it to the best of my ability. I don’t think we’re lying to the viewer about what happened at the story I just can’t put as much effort into it as I would like. If I have more time it’s different.”

The second issue deals with the LNP's topic. Producer 5 said he bases his decision on whether the pool story airs by asking, "Will this impact the viewer?" During our interview he gave an example;

"An impactful story would be a new traffic plan to ease congestion on the interstate, I would use that. But if it's just the mayor unveiling his administration strategy for bringing more business to the city that's something I would skip."

Producer 4 liked to use feature pool items because it worked well at the end of news blocks leading into commercial breaks. Much like the assignment editors, producers based this decision process on their experience and what they have been told by their news directors about where important stories should be placed within the newscast. Those decisions at some stations are ultimately based on market research conducted by a consultant who asked viewers what stories they find important to watch (West, 2011). Producer 4 said,

"I've learned working in this business that it's important to have some sort of happy story – maybe something really visual and eye catching leading into a commercial break. So if the pool story offers that to me I often consider it."

The third part of the decision process concerns time in the newscast. On days stations are dealing with breaking news, several lead stories, or severe weather the LNP becomes a distant thought. Producer 6 said, "It's often the first thing I'll drop." However it was also considered an "added bonus" for the newscast especially on days when a station was low staffed due to vacation or illness. Bottom line – everyday is different. Producer 2 added,

"Sometimes it's just the subject matter. Sometimes it's fluffy and sometimes it's not. Whether I use it just depends on what's going on."

Finally, the LNP offers producers a unique situation where they can have knowledge prior to a newscast that competing stations may have an interest in a story assigned to the pool. Overwhelmingly producers stated they were not influenced by the decisions of other stations because the LNP story is considered “non-competitive” and “filler”. Much like photographers, producers also downgraded the importance of the story assigned to the LNP because of the knowledge a competing station may air it. The exception occurs if the story offers something visual like a demolition of a building.

Producer 3 said,

“If we find out its video we just can’t pass up or the press conference produced some really good sound, then the story becomes something I know I’ll include in my newscast.”

But in the regular day-to-day producers found their efforts were put into the big stories involving a reporter/photographer team working on something they hoped the competition would not have. Producer 5 said,

“I think we just set ourselves apart by covering the bigger stories better. Typically the pool item isn’t the big story of the day, so I think it’s secondary or even below there for importance.”

## **NEWSROOM ROUTINES**

The introduction of the local news pool has created an additional layer of work for assignment editors, photographers, and producers but this study found they use familiar routines when assigning, shooting, and writing the story. For example, assignment editors choose story options, photographers capture the video and interviews, and

producers write the story. RQ3 asked, what effect does a cooperative relationship have on newsroom routines within the levels of the hierarchy of influences model? This discovered while each level takes on new roles each is complementary to the other.

### ***Individual Routines***

The first level explored is the individual level which encompasses the length of time working in the business, gender, and education (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). The participants interviewed for this study came with a wealth of experience in the news business. Producers had an average of 7 years experience, assignment editors interviewed had an average of 11 years working in the news business, and photographers ranged between 4 and 15 years with the average coming in at 9 years of experience. All participants had college degrees. Gender of the participants skewed heavily toward males. Only one assignment editor interviewed for this study was female, all photographers were male, and two out of the seven producers were female.

### ***Media Routines***

The second level looks at participants media routines. This concerns the stable, patterned sets of expectations and constraints that are common to most media organization (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Specifically this study explored the routines when making news decisions concerning story choice for the LNP. The findings suggest that even though each market in this study conducts its pool differently, the decision process is similar. The routine involves assignment editors looking through a docket of

stories, using their experience to base decisions on what can be shared, and then talking to the competing stations about these stories. Assignment editor 3 described them as;

“Press release vo/sots’s. They’re things that have been on the daybooks for all these stations for weeks. We always knew that we were going to go try to get this little tiny vo or vo/sot and we’ll just assign it to the pool.”

When asked to describe what is considered items that every station would have on the books for weeks the resounding answer was “feature stories.” These could be classified as anything from a ground breaking to a rally at the state capital. Once a consensus is reached the photographer shoots the story and the producer writes it.

While many drew on past experiences in the news business to make decisions producer 4 was the only participant in this study that looked at the LNP as an opportunity to choose stories based on what was best for the story at hand;

“Say you have a grieving family. You send one camera instead of five cameras in there. I think that’s the best use of the pool – to be less obtrusive to people that don’t necessarily like the media in their lives.”

This producer also referred to the story mentioned as a “feature” story but with a “harder edge.”

The idea of sending fewer cameras to an “event” has resulted in a new routine within the newsroom. When assignment editors consider stories for the LNP they often base their decision on whether stations could capture the same footage if each were to send its own crew. An example often cited was a press conference. Many times photographers are placed at the back of the room to shoot the podium and then gather crowd shots. Usually, each station walks away with the same content. In order to decide if this will be the case for other potential LNP stories, assignment editors base their

decisions on both experience and information from the press release when considering LNP stories. If there is a concern a bigger story could come out of it, stations send their own crew. This sometimes occurs even when it is assigned to the LNP. Assignment editor 2 gave an example;

“If a press release story is placed on the LNP list but I think there might be something bigger to it, I figure it might be worth sending our own crew. This is especially the case when we want to make it into a reporter package for the day.”

### ***Organizational Routines***

The third level, organizational influences, analyses how the producers of content are affected by the organizational structure and authority. This study specifically looks at how the LNP affects that structure. The findings suggest that the roles within the organization are unchanged. The assignment editor continues to be the gatekeeper of story selection, the photographer shoots the video necessary to tell the story, and the producer controls how the content is presented to the audience. This also means the organizational structure in the newsroom remains the same with the authority of the assignment editor directing the photographer on what story to gather and informing the producer of the content available for the newscast. The photographer then provides that content to the producer.

The big change among the journalists interviewed for this study concerns the policy of news gathering. Because news stations are no longer providing content for just their station and selected stories are now shared among the group, managers implemented a set of rules on how the LNP should operate. Assignment editor 6 said,



“There’s a contract that was written out when it started. That’s where the two out of the three votes comes in for deciding which stories to shoot for the LNS.”

Whether it was a contract or official rules for how the LNP should operate, all participants said they had knowledge of the “official rules” but had never seen a written document and instead learned of the policy through word of mouth. Enforcement of these rules by news managers was viewed as mild. Many felt that as long as the LNP was operating on a daily basis managers did not question decisions made by those involved. But photographer 5 said they monitor what the competition provides;

“If somebody is not using a tripod when they definitely should have been, that will be a conversation that our news directors will have with each other and just say, ‘Hey, this wasn’t as high quality as it should be,’ or they’re not using a light on an interview. We don’t just slack off on it just because it’s a pool event.”

While the job roles within the organizational structure remain virtually unchanged, perhaps the biggest change in the operating structure has occurred in the Tampa news market where their LNS has become a separate organization from the current newsrooms. Assignment editor 7 described the change;

“So the idea is LNS is separate from the individual newsrooms. We’re not supposed to be ABC people or FOX people. We are LNS. We have to do what’s good for the majority.”

While the roles within this new structure remain the same, it functions as a separate entity from the current newsrooms. Specific workers, such as assignment editors and photographers, are assigned to take on roles that require them to participate only in the LNS. Photographer 6 described the organizational change as a shift in mindset;

“So the line does not get blurred, you are either shooting for LNS on a shift or your station.”

This new structure has resulted for some in the feeling of a lack of loyalty to one organization over the other. Because many workers who are assigned to the LNS have been employed in previous news jobs that didn't require the sharing of content, the change in policy and structure is a hard adjustment. Photographer 7 said,

“Having to flip a switch in my head and give all this information to another assignment editor was really strange to me.”

Other photographers felt a lack of ownership to the story they are assigned – meaning if they captured something that would normally be hailed by their station as a job well done, the LNS does not acknowledge that. Photographer 7 said,

“Say I got the guy in the car accident being brought into the ambulance, that's the kind of video that shows I'm the first one there. That's what people in the newsroom would get excited about.”

Still because expectations and goals are laid out by news managers, workers complete the task assigned which often requires working with an individual from a competing station.

These changes are a direct result of the organization's efforts to save money. This study finds that economic factors have played a major role in the creation and implementation of the LNP. Assignment editor 6 said,

“I don't know how much money our station is saving or making from this arrangement but I can only imagine it's a lot since we're sharing a helicopter with the other stations in Tampa.”

Assignment editor 2 thought the change was an effort to hire fewer photographers;

“When our station had two photographers leave it was thought the LNP could help our station keep a good number of stories coming in while not having to rehire for those positions right away.”

Producer 7 described the sharing of content as the evolution of television news;

“We’ve been preached to about having fewer resources and needing to do more with our resources for so long that it kinda makes sense.”

While news managers were not interviewed for this study, many participants believe that forming a cooperative partnership with a competing organization became less of an issue because each organization was feeling the same pressure from the top to do more with less. However participants were not privy to information on how much the organization was saving or how those savings were being utilized. Workers in the Tampa and Denver markets felt confident the savings were significant since each station was sharing the cost of a single helicopter. Assignment editor 5 said;

“I would be curious to see how much they are truly saving. I think because three stations are no longer leasing their own helicopter I’m sure there’s quite a savings with that.”

Participants also stated the LNP has not affected advertisers from spending at their station, although none had a direct relationship with the sales department to confirm that information. Because managers did not suggest to them that advertising revenue is an issue, workers assumed the station was still generating money.

### ***Extramedia Influence***

The fourth and final level, the extramedia influence, explores outside sources, competition, and the audience. Specifically this study looked at how the LNP is pitched to news stations, if a competing station is more or less likely to air the story based on knowledge that another station is interested in the story, and if stations consider the lack of acknowledgement to the audience concerning the LNP important.

*Public Relations Firms* Based on observation of the LNP conference call in Austin, the majority of stories considered for it came in the form of a press release from a public relations firm or directly from the organization such as the police department or non-profit promoting their event. By receiving a press release stating general facts it was assumed by assignment editors that every station had knowledge of the event. In the rare case a competing station did not know about it, it was still a story considered “non-competitive”. Because the event was pitched via a press release and the intent of the public relations person or organization was to garner as much media attention as possible the story was automatically viewed as a shareable item.

In rare cases, press releases in Austin, Texas, would refer to the story as a good option for the pool. Assignment editor 1 said,

“Public relation firms and especially government officials who hold press conferences were often disappointed that only one camera would show up to an event, but when they figured out that one camera translates into four stations having the content it wasn’t so bad. In the past if one camera showed up, they knew only one station would have the option of airing the story.”

As a result, outside organizations have started pitching items as pool stories in the hope all of the stations would have the option to air it. Assignment editor 3 said,

“It’s like gambling. They can hope each station shows up or they can place their bet on the LNP, which means all of the stations have the video and interviews for the newscast.”

Assignment editors in Tampa and Denver echoed the same sentiments and said the majority of stories generated for the LNP came from press releases. The exception to

this finding was primarily in Tampa where assignment editors also generated story content from the police scanners. This was the only market where non-scheduled events such as breaking news were considered a pool item on a daily basis. For example, car accidents, fires, and bank robberies, depending on their level of severity, were considered shareable content. Assignment editor 7 described a situation the LNS was used on breaking news;

“Say we have a car accident and none of the stations want to send their own crews because it’s not a huge deal but they want the video. Chances are it best fits for the LNS that way the other stations don’t have to stop one of their photographers from working on a bigger story just to pick this up.”

*Desire to broadcast* Because stations share their ideas for pool items and are assigned to cover certain stories it leads to the question of whether news stations are more or less likely to broadcast a story knowing a competing station might show it. In the past the only way stations knew a competitor was interested in a certain story was when crews would see each other at the same event. Now, either through the daily conference call or e-mails, news department have knowledge of who is shooting what story.

This study found the producer is the main decision maker about whether a story will air. Knowledge of the competition gathering the LNP story or another station expressing interest in it didn’t lead to a greater desire in producers to air the story.

Producer 3 said,

“It really doesn’t impact us much. I mean it’s a pool event that I might use 60 or 70 percent of the time – these are not must run stories. It’s just another thing we can throw in a newscast if we need to.”

Producer 1 felt it wasn't so much whether the competition was shooting the story but whether it would be fed to the station in enough time for her to write it;

“Sometimes the FTP can take hours and so while I may want it for my newscast I don't ever look at the LNP stories as the one story I need to have in my newscast.”

Because the pool stories are considered the “filler” or “non-competitive” content for the newscast there was a general lack of interest concerning how the competition would utilize the story. The general focus concerned the competition's lead story, not the LNP. An individual station's ownership of the big story was the number one priority for the participants interviewed. The LNP was “extra material” and something a producer would drop from the show if he or she started to run out of time within their newscast.

*Transparency* The issue of transparency or the lack there of was a topic many interviewed for this study thought was a non-problem. Because there was an overall lack of interest in the LNP stories, it appears it also carried over to their thoughts concerning the audience being aware that a competing station covered the event. None of the stations that took part in this study currently acknowledge to their audience that an LNP story was shot by a competing station. In fact, when asked if they thought it should be mentioned to the audience either with a graphic on the screen or verbally, most participants said that was something they had never thought of. Producer 6 said,

“That's a great question. That's a great question – I don't know.”

Photographer 4 felt the lack of federal regulation over the pool led to the decision of not labeling the LNP stories.

“Under the guidelines, like a VOD that you would have to by FCC rules, we do not have to label that, and we don’t.”

In addition, photographers found the content that can be shot for the LNP could look very similar to another station’s if each attended the same event. Photographer 1 said,

“If we had one camera there or we had five cameras there from all different stations, they’re getting the exact same thing from the same angle, from the same position, at the same podium, and they’re not getting anything special, anything behind the scenes because there is only one camera there.”

Plus due to each station providing raw content such as video and interviews many participants felt that allowed each news department to make their own editorial decisions, leading to varied coverage. In essence once a station was provided the LNP material they were able to create their own story.

This lack of transparency also is carried over to the helicopters in Tampa and Denver. Both markets share one helicopter that flies during their morning and early evening newscasts. This means each station receives the exact same content, however producers and assignment editors said they feel the viewer won’t notice. Prior to the pool agreement, each station was gathering the same shot from its own helicopter – meaning the visual hasn’t changed. In addition news workers said they feel confident the audience is not flipping channels during the newscast to see what the other stations are reporting. Photographer 6 said,

“The viewer would have no idea that there’s only one helicopter, unless they had four channels up and were watching the same shot at the same time.”

Assignment editor 4 echoed the same sentiment;

“I don’t think we need to label it – I don’t think the viewer cares. There’s really no reason for it very few people are flipping back and forth between stations.”

Others felt safety outweighed any type of transparency with the audience. Photographer 7 said,

“Pooling the helicopter footage is probably one of the most brilliant ideas that anyone ever came up with. And I know that that was started in large part after the Phoenix helicopter tragedy that happened about four years ago, but we’re all getting the same shot and we’re all there, and now we don’t have as many helicopters up in the air.”

However, even in the promotion of the helicopter there is a lack of transparency with the audience when the anchor refers to the aerial shots. In Denver, prior to the pool agreement each station’s helicopter had its own name. For example, NBC was Sky 9 and CBS was News Chopper 4. Even though this shared helicopter has no branding on the side to be identified as a news station helicopter from the air, stations still promote it as their own. They do this by referring to the helicopter with its specific name and often showing old video of their previous helicopter that had their station’s logo. This is often seen during a promotional commercial for the station or during what’s called “wipes” - when a few seconds of video is shown prior to the anchor talking about the story using the helicopter shot. Photographer 5 explained;

“And so the funny thing is, is now that the helicopter, the one single helicopter, when they show video, they promote it as their one helicopter with the name that



it's always been. So the viewer would have no idea that there's only one helicopter, unless they had four channels up and were watching the same shot at the same time."

It's believed the purpose of continuing to promote individual helicopters is to remind viewers of the station's ownership of the helicopter and its ability to provide the viewer additional content.

### **NEGOTIATING WITH THE COMPETITION**

When television stations within a single market form a cooperative relationship in order to share content the negotiation of power is most clearly found during the phone calls and e-mail exchanges between stations. While the LNP is designed to provide an even playing field where each station receives the same content, this study found competition is not taken away when content is shared and a change in mindset is created by workers as a result of the LNP. This study found each market functions differently and to answer RQ 4, how does the level of participation affect the LNP partners, it is important to first explain the findings by individual market and then analyze its meaning in the bigger picture.

*Austin, Texas* Looking at the motivation by stations to participate in the LNP was best analyzed in the Austin, Texas, television market because I was granted access to the e-mail exchanges, observation of the conference call, and daily follow-up interviews if needed with workers. During this time a few incidents took place behind the scenes showing convergence does not take away competition.

The first situation dealt with a court case and the hope by KXAN (2<sup>nd</sup> rated) that the competition would not cover it. While court cases are often found on the daily LNP list that is e-mailed to the competition, on this particular day the assignment editor at KXAN left it off. By not listing it, he hoped no one would ask for it because it was taking place almost an hour out of town few would make the drive. But when the conference call began the assignment editor from KEYE (4<sup>th</sup> rated) asked, “Is anyone going to the Norwood case?” KXAN’s response, “No, I don’t know if we’re going to make it.” When asked why he lied to the competition he said,

When court cases are closer it’s not a big deal but since this is a challenge to get to since it’s further away I’m less willing to help them out. Plus KVUE is not always willing to help unless a reporter is going to it so I was less willing to help.

KVUE, the number one station in town, was found to make few concessions during the conference call and typically was less friendly. When they offered to take a story for the LNP, the assignment editor said, “We’re going to this story so we can share it.”

Meanwhile, KEYE the lowest rated station in town was most friendly on the conference call and would often said, “If anyone needs this we can go.”

But because of the negative affect experienced by KXAN from KVUE, KXAN was less willing to help and acted more competitive. This example was not indicative of the overall observation, in fact, many times the assignment editor’s behavior on the conference call and e-mail exchanges were cooperative. But a second instance observed demonstrated that cooperation doesn’t take away competition and instead deception is created.

On this day the assignment editor from KXAN was the first one to speak up during the conference call as usual and asked the other three assignment editors on the line if anyone was interested in shooting the events he had listed on the daily LNP docket. KVUE's assignment editor quickly chimed in that they would be able to pick up the 10 a.m. press conference at the Austin Police Department. This particular event was not on the LNP list and when the KXAN assignment editor went into his personal list of stories (these would not be included on the LNP docket) his station was going to consider for both reporters and photographers that day, this particular press conference was not listed. With a very smooth, calm voice, sounding as if he had known for weeks about this press conference, the KXAN assignment editor said, "That's great, I'll mark you down." Following the conference call he quickly phoned the police department to find out what the press conference was in reference to. It turned out it was dealing with an Army sergeant being charged with sexual assault of a teenager. KXAN decided to send its own photographer and reporter team to the press conference in order to make it a bigger story for that night's newscast.

"Would we have found out about the press conference? Probably - I hadn't made my daily call to the police yet to see what was happening," said the KXAN assignment editor. But even though he was not aware of the press conference he didn't want to alert the competition that they may have given up a valuable piece of information that particular station could have had to itself. This aspect of how LNP members behave differently when they are the only ones with a story also emerged during an interview with an assignment editor who said, "There's always things I won't mention in the LNP

in the hopes that everyone will forget and that maybe we can go and have that to ourselves.” Asked if that was sneaking around the competition’s back, he quickly followed up with the notion that he typically does that when he knows a particular photographer is already assigned to cover the story with a reporter and he doesn’t want to deal with the logistics of asking the photographer to shoot one part for the LNP while shooting a bigger story to air in the newscast with a reporter.

On the flip side, some have used this convergence model as a self-serving tool in order to appear competitive to the audience when stories not assigned to the LNP have been missed, either through lack of photographers or lack of knowledge about the event. For example one day a station sent an e-mail saying, “Would anyone be willing to share the double fatal car accident out in Bastrop County?” This accident occurred 45 minutes outside of Austin. For those who sent a photographer to cover the accident it meant either pulling someone off an assigned story or having an evening reporter wait to go out on a story while their photographer traveled to Bastrop to get video and interviews. On this particular day none of the stations participating in the LNP group responded to the e-mail. Whether it was due to lack of time to upload to the FTP site or an unwillingness to give up a story that required stations to rearrange their schedules to cover it, it was not distributed within the LNP.

But many times stations have been willing to help out. For instance an e-mail from KTBC (3<sup>rd</sup> rated) was sent to the LNP group in the afternoon saying;

“We would like to respond to the two fires in South Austin, but it would compromise our contribution to the LNP. I wanted to see if anyone can share so I can bring my photographer back to start processing the video. Can anyone help?”

This was a case where a second station responded to the e-mail saying they were sending a photographer to the fires and would put it up on the FTP site to share. An assignment editor said, “Sometimes it’s worth helping the others out when something pops up at the last minute.”

But that is clearly not always the case and each situation is evaluated on a case-by-case basis. By analyzing these examples it would appear that an unwritten evaluation process occurs for each assignment editor where he or she assesses the depth of the news event and, if sharing with the competition would hurt their station. Participation in the LNP is often based on the amount of effort a station would have to put into the story, driving distance, and available staff. A second factor concerns stories not originally listed on the LNP docket such as spot news. In the evaluation process of whether a station is willing to share the content two questions are asked, how many other stations attended the event and did one station capture elements such as exclusive interviews the others did not.

*Tampa, Florida* The Tampa, Florida, market offered a unique perspective on participation and competition because this market has what could be considered a third party organizing their LNS. Because there are dedicated assignment editors and photographers who are not affiliated with one station and their only job is to provide content for the group, organized cooperation is their goal instead of competition. However because they are a neutral party in organizing the content, participating stations try to manipulate them in order to learn what the competition is interested in covering.

This is primarily because that the LNS will cover spot news such as car accidents or fires.

LNS assignment editor 6 explains;

“I will get calls like, ‘Hey, has anyone called you on this? Have you heard anything about this?’ And I’ll say, ‘no’. That is their way of knowing if the other stations knew about it.....basically they’d try to use me and it happens all the time.”

But because the LNS assignment editors are truthful to stations concerning whether another station has inquired about a story, producers are constantly weighing the option of competition before contacting the LNS. Producer 6 said,

“Before I call LNS I have to think do I maybe want an exclusive on this story or do I just want to make sure it gets covered. For example I know LNS has a photographer in Sarasota so they could get there quicker than we could and could have a better chance of getting better video or getting an active scene. So I need to weigh how bad do I need this big story or do I want to lose my exclusivity?”

On non-spot news events, participation is based on a majority vote. The assignment editor calls each station to inquire about its interest for the LNS and a second call is made once a list is compiled. If two out of three stations voice an interest in a story it is shot and distributed to the group. Assignment editor 7 said,

“So I do things across the board evenly. If two stations say don’t do it, I didn’t do it. I played it fair. That’s the way I found was the best way to do it.”

During the interviews the word “fair” came up frequently. LNS assignment editors were very cognizant of their role as a neutral party in deciding content for the group. When asked if they ever favored the station that paid their salary many said they had no allegiance to a certain station and were paid to act as a go-between. In fact, even when producers within their own station inquired about the competition’s interest in certain

stories, LNS editors said they did not feel an obligation to hold that information from another station if asked.

While this market was not observed, LNS assignment editors said that participation was like a democracy and the majority vote led the decision making. There was no negotiation with stations on whether the LNS could shoot a story if two out of three stations said “yes” it was shot, if they voted “no” it was not. Ratings were not a factor and there was not a dominant station when it came to dictating content. While feature stories or “b-level” spot news such as minor car accidents or fires were often shot for the LNS, everyday was different and LNS assignment editors did not waiver from how content was decided upon. Assignment editor 6 said,

“It’s basically something they wouldn’t want to, for lack of a better word, waste their own people on. The whole point of LNS is to beef up story content.”

*Denver, Colorado* This study found that competition is behind every decision made in Denver, Colorado. Stations are focused on stories that will set them apart from the competition. “The Pool” is there to provide one story that each station would like but doesn’t have the desire to devote a crew to cover. The assignment editors interviewed for this study said that participation among the five stations was “even”. However when asked if ratings were a factor, producer 4, from the number one station said,

“The competition can be kinda jerks, I mean just from e-mails you can tell the tone is kind of resentful. I don’t know. I guess their management has somehow convinced them that they should be #1, but for some unfair reason we are. I don’t know. We get a lot of attitude from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place stations, just in e-mails.”

But regardless of the “attitude” the producer felt everyone went on to fulfill their commitment to the Pool.

Photographer 5 relayed a story that he felt demonstrated some of the best uses for competing stations coming together to share content. It happened in January after a sheriff was arrested and jailed. The judge lowered the sheriff’s bond and every station had a crew there in case the sheriff was freed on bond. The problem was that the jail exits. In order to cover them all, the stations needed more than one crew to keep watch. It was in that moment that the crews on the scene decided it would make the most sense to have each station watch a door and pool the video;

“It was under the agreement that when he did come out, if somebody didn’t get that, we would all share. So for situations like that, it’s come in handy. I mean extremely handy and more useful than you can imagine.”

While he went on to say these situations have been rare, the fact that it is an option is unique and helpful. If it wasn’t for the pool on this particular occasion, there could have been far fewer other news stories as a result of multiple photographers devoting their day to watching for the sheriff leaving the jailhouse instead of covering other news.

## **THE BIGGER PICTURE**

While each market demonstrates a different motivation to participate, the negotiation of power is seen through three consistent factors – effort, ratings, and mindset. Effort is often seen in the form of driving distance. When assignment editors consider stories for the LNP, LNS, or The Pool one of the first thoughts is, how much effort will our station have to put into this story? Because driving a long distance to



cover a story can mean possibly missing something closer to home in the event of breaking news, assignment editors frequently don't want to take the risk or make the effort for a story that will be shared.

Ratings also factor in this decision process, especially in the Austin and Denver markets. It appears the numerical placement of the station can often correspond with the attitude of workers at the station. Those who were number one often demonstrated a sense of superiority and those further down in the ratings were more willing to take part in the LNP. And workers at these various stations are always cognizant of the attitudes of the competitors.

For example, in Austin, assignment managers felt the number one station didn't have a great desire to take part in the LNP. While the assignment editor at that station acknowledged that was the case, he said it was only partly due to his feelings concerning the LNP, but others linked it to their number one status and feelings of superiority. This on occasion led others to feel a lack of desire to go out of their way to gather stories for that station. On the flip side the assignment editor at the number four station was overly cooperative and willing to help his fellow competitors. In e-mail exchanges he would often say things like, "we'll try to pick it up for the group", "we just shot the dog event and are willing to FTP it if anyone wants it", or "our photographer was running late to the event we were supposed to cover, we'll have the story up on FTP as soon as possible." His friendly nature also led some of the other assignment editors to go out of their way for that station if they needed a story and were low on staff on a given day.

And finally participation in the LNP requires a change in mindset by workers in order to make it function on a day-to-day basis. The participants interviewed in this study had all been employed in the television news business prior to the creation of the LNP and have always been told their job is to beat the competition. So when they were told the story they were covering was being shared with the competition it was a foreign thought. Many of the workers said in the interview, “I thought this is crazy!”, “My first thought was is this going to lead to me losing my job because they won’t need as many photographers,” or “How am I supposed to make this work?” But once these LNP’s were put into practice and stations began to cooperate with one another, the level of competition didn’t go away - it merely changed. Workers came to realize participation in an LNP didn’t stop them from being competitors but in many cases made their job easier because it kept them from getting assigned additional stories.

When workers felt the level of participation was even it made them want to take part in the LNP and keep it functioning so each station could receive a story. Even perceptions that a competitor was slacking didn’t stop the LNP from continuing to operate because other workers didn’t want to disappoint those who were providing content for the group. The negotiation of power among stations was often demonstrated in e-mail exchanges in the Austin, Texas, television market. Here assignment managers could ignore requests or offer help. Because participation was always voluntary the mindset of how a station perceived another often resulted in whether additional content was shared or their request for help was answered. For example, if a station put out an e-

mail request that an apartment fire become part of the LNP due to a station being low on staff, a competing station could either choose to help or ignore the request all together.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES**

The LNP has not only led to a restructuring of how story content is produced it has also resulted in changes within the structure of the organization. Those involved with the LNP are no longer focused on just their station, they must be aware of their role in providing content for the competition. This new convergence model of competing stations working in a cooperative manner has led to additional work for assignment editors, a perception change for photographers when capturing a story, and producers having to rely on the competition for content. These changes have resulted in a new form of power sharing, teamwork, control over ones work, and redefined news values.

*Power sharing* In order for the LNP to function managers had to first lay the groundwork with expectations and guidelines for how it should operate. While workers stated these rules were written down, none had ever seen it and instead made the LNP work on a daily basis based on initial instructions by management. Changes to its initial structure were done based on problems that arose over the years. For example in Denver, stations were originally shooting three stories a day but after producers found they were not using all of the content assignment editors decided one story per day would suffice.

The oversight in running this convergence model is based on expectations that a station assigned a story will also produce it. Participants reported very few problems, those that did arise, such as poor video quality or feeding the story late, were often dealt

with by the assignment editors talking among themselves. News directors were rarely brought into the mix because the LNP often operated without problems and story choices were typically considered “non-competitive.” The few times a news director was consulted were typically over requests by competitors to share content not intended for the LNP such as spot news or harder news stories. Assignment editor 1 said,

“When another station requests something like a fire or I don’t know something not on the LNP list I often just ignore it. Once in a while I’ll ask my news director what he thinks – especially in cases where I think we may have picked up some pretty cool video. Often he’ll tell me to tell them sorry, we can’t do it.”

In Tampa, the LNS assignment editors felt the organization lacked a central manager. Because the LNS has become its own entity within the market, news directors from each station currently oversee it, making it difficult for LNS assignment editors to make big decisions. Assignment editor 7 said,

“We need someone to make executive decisions not on day-to-day stuff but the bigger issues like overtime and a hurricane plan for the LNS. If I have one of my photographers out on breaking news and they run past their shift then I may have to deal with a backlash from that news director. It’s tough because we are just left to our own devices.”

Their goal is to avoid getting in trouble with management. But many times these assignment editors make decisions without consulting a manager and they report that so far there hasn’t been a problem.

*Teamwork* Creating a teamwork approach to the LNP also has resulted in additional job duties. Assignment editors are now accountable not only for story content produced for their station but also for finding stories that can be shared and providing crews to shoot it. Producers now must rely on the competition for story content and photographers

are responsible for capturing the big picture of an event so competing stations can use the content in various forms. While initial reaction to this organizational change was skeptical, particularly among photographers, photographer 3 said the benefits outweigh any negative feelings about sharing stories with the competition;

“In the beginning it was a big fight by all of us because we’re like, ‘Hey, that’s job security that we’re giving up by shooting three other stories for another station’. But once I saw how it worked I realized this frees up at least two other photographers to go out and really spend time on a different story. I think this works great.”

*Control* This study found there was a general feeling of acceptance for the LNP based on workers observation of it running smoothly but most importantly, in not interfering with their job. This was particularly true among assignment editors. Even though they were given an additional job of working directly with the competition they reported having a lot of autonomy and control over what they covered plus it didn’t lessen their ability to work for their organization. In fact, many said it often led to happier producers because they had extra content and more pleasant exchanges with photographers because they didn’t have to reshuffle their day to pick up extra stories. The LNP allowed for an easier work day as long as the competing organizations produced the content assigned.

Assignment editor 4 said,

“Overall I would say the pool has worked out for us. Because each station is assigned their own day of the week we know when one of our guys will have to shoot for the pool. So when someone gets assigned that job it’s not a surprise because they know it’s our day – plus it makes for an easier day for them since they just have to shoot a vo/sot or two.”

*News Values* However, in order for this shift in teamwork to take place workers had to redefine their news values. It could be considered one of the biggest changes within this convergence model because workers have been conditioned to believe that their job is to beat the competing stations in the ratings game. Producing unique stories, capturing compelling video, and finding stories the competing stations don't have are the goals. While the LNP has been designed to only share content that doesn't fit within those values, it still redefines the competition when stations are willing to cooperate and share content. This is especially the case concerning breaking news.

Photographer 6 said he was amazed at the amount of time stations would take to decide if a breaking news story, like a car accident or fire, was to be shot by the LNS or individual stations,

“Breaking news by committee is such a strange thing to me because it's not what I've lived and breathed for so many years before coming here.”

One day he said he heard a car accident on the scanner. The assignment editor then phoned the LNS desk to see if they would cover it. Because the rules state the LNS needs two out of three stations requesting the story in order to shoot it, several minutes passed as the LNS assignment editor phoned two other stations. By the time the LNS assignment editor called back to say they would not go, the photographer said almost 10 minutes had passed and the scene his station was interested in covering could have been in the clearing stages – essentially missing the important video.

“Here they don't seem to mind the time that lapses between when they hear the call on the scanner and they get the tip from a viewer and the time that a crew is actually physically sent into their vehicle. I happen to think that time is critical.

But with the way LNS works, it doesn't seem like...it kinda seems like the stations agreed to kind of just have this lapse time now."

*Breaking news values* This example demonstrates how news values concerning breaking news are redefined. Prior to the LNP this station would have likely sent a photographer to at least check out the car accident. But because of this other source that can provide content there's a cultural change to the idea of being first on the scene. A value that news departments have held closely over the years is being the first or only station to cover an event. And while that is still the case in many instances, the LNP has allowed for these values to become of less importance when a story is categorized as "shared." In addition the example validated the station's decision not to send its own crews because the other stations were not interested in it.

In Austin, Texas, breaking news is not considered part of their LNP - however, this has been redefined within the last year as stations put in requests for non-planned events that they couldn't get a crew to such as a bank robbery, fire, or car accident. As a whole, it appears the news organizations have redefined what is considered important breaking news by evaluating the video that is shot. Assignment editor 2 explained why a bank robbery is now defined as a sharable story;

"You know that everyone will be able to capture the same scene – you have a building with yellow tape around it and officers standing around. I don't think it's anything that will make or break the newscast."

When asked if the story then lacks importance because it becomes a shareable breaking news item producer 2 said, "It's just viewed as something extra to put into the show, an added bonus." This statement demonstrates that by placing a story into the context of

something that all stations have access to it becomes something “extra” and not necessarily something needed. It’s important to point this out because valuing the content within a newscast defines the values of the station and what is ultimately important for the audience to know.

This change leads to questions on whether the producer is rationalizing their decision concerning the importance of the story or validating their judgment. It could be argued it’s both. If the producer truly wants the story this study finds they will put it in their show. However, when the story is something the producer’s station may not have shot it becomes less important and placed into an “extra” category in their mind. Essentially they have it if they need it and if not it can be left out of the newscast.

The LNP has created a new method for organizations to gather content but it also has redefined stories that are a must have for the newscast and those that are considered extra. By the organization defining a news story as shareable it changes the mindset of the worker to something that lacks immediate importance – this could be one reason why producers call LNP stories “filler”. It fulfills the need of the producer to fill time in their show but it lacks importance because of the knowledge that every organization has access to it.

## **NEWS HOMOGENIZATION**

One of the goals of the LNP is to provide each station with enough video and interviews to allow producers the ability to make editorial decisions on how to present the story. This study found the typical amount of video shot was 20 minutes and



photographers tried to gather one to two interviews. LNP stories that were press conferences typically consisted of video and sound from the person talking at the podium. This content is then fed in an unedited format to the partnering stations for use. Because each station taking part in this cooperative news gathering method has access to the same content RQ 6a asks, do news workers believe the LNP affects news homogenization? The results indicate potential homogenization from the LNP stories is a topic not often considered an issue, few efforts are made to distinguish the LNP story from the competition, and there is a lack of transparency with the audience.

*Creating homogenization* The potential for homogenization begins everyday when the assignment editors make a group decision on the content covered under the LNP. By acknowledging certain stories are important for their newscast, there is the potential for a competing station to air a story that they otherwise would not have. However, at the same time, this study found that stories assigned to the LNP were often devalued by the producers. Because “non-competitive” feature type content was assigned to the LNP, it led to less of a desire to air the story because it wouldn’t set them apart from the competition. When the topic of homogenization was brought up during the interviews a common reaction to the questions were, “I never really thought about it.” Producers often blamed their lack of concern on a greater desire to be focused on their big news stories of the day and looked at the LNP as something extra - if it made the show “great” and if not “oh well”.

This study also found that photographers were given most of the blame for the potential homogenization within the LNP. While they are instructed to gather enough

content to allow for different editorial decisions, they don't put their best journalistic efforts forward when assigned to an LNP story. Because they know the story will be shared, they capture the basics and don't look for anything extra such as additional sound bites or a unique side story. Photographer 1 said,

“The pool events are a 10 second sound bite and a 10 to 15 second feature video. These aren't the long packages unless something extraordinary happens and if that's the case we'll put our own crew on it.”

Finding something out of the ordinary isn't important and it was said to be rare for something outside of the pre-planned LNP story to occur. To photographers a pool shoot was not about developing sources, making contacts, or finding additional news stories, it was about shooting the required content for the pool and moving onto the next story.

*Competition* This lack of desire for making the LNP story unique was carried over to the producer in charge of writing it. The topic of setting oneself apart from the competition became a theme in the interviews and the LNP was not viewed as a news item that could provide that. Instead it allowed for photographers to concentrate on other stories that would make the station stand out. Producer 5 said,

“Typically the pool item isn't the big story of the day, so I think it's secondary or even below there for importance. So I think we just set ourselves apart by covering the bigger stories better.”

Other producers focused less on the content of the LNP story and more on how it was presented to the audience by the anchor. For example in Tampa, the ABC affiliate has a special set called the “breaking news desk” where the anchor reads stories that are considered “breaking news” such as a fire or car accident. Because the LNS in that market often shoots spot news, producers felt they could make their content look different

from the competition by having the anchor read the story from the special set, even though the video was often identical to the other stations. Producer 7 said,

“We try and work on what we can control. Because we can control how it is presented we take advantage of that to make our LNS story look different from the competition.”

*Lack of transparency* All of the participants said their station did not label video as “LNP” resulting in a lack of transparency with the audience. Assignment editor 6 thought it might confuse viewers;

“I don’t think that people would realize and understand what LNS is because most people outside of news have never heard of the term. You’d have to explain it every time to the audience, ‘Our LNS partners shot this’, that would be too much of a pain.”

That lack of trust in the audience to understand this concept of sharing video with the competition was often blamed on their “low intelligence level.” A photographer even went as far to say, “I really don’t trust the audience to be able to interpret that information correctly, I don’t think the audience is that intelligent.” There was also a general feeling the audience was not flipping stations - in essence they would never realize competing television stations could potentially show the same video and sound bites. Only producer 5 felt labeling the video as “LNP” was a good idea saying, “I would appreciate it if I were a viewer.” But he felt it wasn’t a topic worth bringing up with management because he had “bigger things to worry about.”

Stations have acknowledged the presence of the LNP with one group – public relations firms. Photographers said they find themselves explaining to PR people that only one photographer will show up at their event because the story is being pooled. This

concept, while initially foreign to the PR firm, has become a new and accepted way of providing news content. Photographers discovered that once a PR firm grasped the concept of the LNP they would provide a setup conducive to the needs of the pool such as the potential for several interviews and video opportunities. It was believed that PR firms understood multiple cameras may not show up at their event but it could be broadcast on several stations. In addition if they provided opportunities for the photographer to interview multiple people or get ample video it had the potential to look different on each newscast. Photographer 2 described how the LNP has changed working with public relation firms;

“When we first started the LNP I would show up at a press conference the PR person would say, ‘We’ll just wait a few minutes for the other crews to arrive.’ I would say, ‘I’m the only one so we can get started.’ Often they wouldn’t believe me so I would have to sit around and wait while they watched for other stations. Now all I have to say is ‘I’m the pool guy’ and they understand that it’s not like the other stations aren’t interested in their story – it’s that they aren’t showing up because it’s an LNP story.”

## **IN SUMMARY**

This chapter has laid the groundwork for how an LNP operates, its effects on journalists within an organization, the changes in news values, and the potential impact on the audience. By incorporating this new convergence model within the newsroom it has resulted in a revamped look at the multilayer gatekeeping process, new routines for workers, and a change in mindset concerning the importance of stories.

This study found the LNP can come in various forms within newsrooms but it often functions in a similar manner. Each market studied found the convergence model was run by the assignment editors, stories were shot by the photographer, and the

producers ultimately decided if the story would air and wrote it. This new multilayer gatekeeping process incorporates the competition into the decision making process instead of workers within a single organization. Decisions concerning what stories to include in the LNP were similar as well by the assignment editor asking, is the story from a press release? Would each station capture the same video? How much effort will my station have to put into this story? Does it occur at an hour where it can be shot and fed to the competing stations within the allotted time?

The outlier within the markets studied was in Tampa, Florida, where the LNS is its own entity with assignment editors and photographers operating as a separate organization and breaking news is often considered a part of the pool on a daily basis. Here it was discovered that stations were willing to miss potential spot news or try to discover the competitions desire for stories by contacting the LNS assignment editor. Because the LNS assignment editor functions as a neutral party between competing stations, it was found workers tried to use them for information to validate their own news judgment concerning what is important or unimportant breaking news to cover.

Overall, the news values concerning the importance of a story were found to change when it was categorized as something “shared”. This study found photographers put less effort into an LNP story and producers had less desire to place it within their newscast. This apathy for certain news content led producers to call LNP stories “extra” or “filler” and not something needed. Many cited the fact that these stories were features and it was more important to allot the time within the news broadcast for the bigger stories of the day, such as a reporter/photographer story.

In the end the audience is left in the dark concerning these LNP stories because none of the stations studied label the video as such. In fact, workers found this lack of transparency important because they felt viewers lacked the intelligence to understand

what the LNP meant. Many said it would not only be awkward to explain it to the audience, journalists didn't believe the audience was flipping channels in such a way that they would even notice more than one station running similar content.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Study 2 – Content Analysis**

The second part this research sets out to answer two additional research questions and add more depth to a research question from study 1;

- RQ2 – what is the most common type of LNP story used in a newscast? (new)
- RQ4 – how does the level of participation affect the LNP partners?
- RQ6b – does the LNP affects news homogenization? (new)

In order for these questions to be answered the affiliates in Austin, Texas, KXAN (NBC), KVUE (ABC), KEYE (CBS), and KTBC (FOX), were recorded during a one month period. The 5 p.m., 6 p.m., 9 p.m. (the FOX station only because this is their late news time slot) and 10 p.m. newscasts were selected for this study because the majority of the LNP shoots take place during the day and are used for those evening newscasts. A list of each story selected for the LNP and the station assigned to shoot the story were acquired for each week, Monday through Friday, during this one-month period to provide an accurate list of which news stories to analyze.

Each story was coded for the station that shot the event, which station used the LNP story within their broadcast, how it was presented, i.e. VO (voice over, approximately 20 seconds in length), vo/sot (voice over with a sound bite, approximately 45 seconds in length), or package (news package which is a combination of a reporter voice over with sound bites, approximately one minute 30 seconds in length), and the

type of story, i.e.; police, fire, crime, spot news, court, consumer, military, rally, feature, sports, health, education, government, travel, transportation, or other.

## **DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS**

During the one month period analyzed, 41 stories were assigned to the LNP in Austin, Texas. Out of those stories KXAN (2<sup>nd</sup> rated) used the most LNP stories within their newscast (n=21), followed by KTBC (3<sup>rd</sup> rated) (n=20), KEYE (4<sup>th</sup> rated) (n=18), and KVUE (1<sup>st</sup> rated) (n=16). The most common story shot for the LNP was a feature (n= 16), followed by consumer (n= 9), government (n= 5), education (n= 3), police (n=2), health (n= 2), crime (n=1), rally (n=1), transportation (n=1), and other (n= 1)<sup>2</sup>.

In order to provide a better understanding of the meaning of the stories analyzed, the top three, feature, consumer, and government are described in detail. The stories found to be “features” were a mustache growing contest, Santa arriving at the mall, a story dealing with help at the local food bank, kids playing with toys, music at the airport, a man practicing his Thanksgiving turkey call, turkey donations, a local church performing holiday music, a local park getting a makeover, two stories dealing with dog adoptions, two stories about holiday lights going up, a new animal shelter opening, free Thanksgiving meals, and finally taxicabs getting decked out for the holidays.

Stories considered in the “consumer” category were a company showcasing a new car that can talk to the driver, a new alarm system residents could buy to keep them safe during the holidays, new luggage for the holidays, avoiding high prices for turkeys,

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<sup>2</sup> The category labeled other dealt with a story concerning a funeral.



recycling holiday waste, increase in taxis at the airport, lower ticket prices for a theater, the Agricultural Commissioner talking about saving money by buying local, and a new way to save on electric bills.

And finally the category of “government” was labeled on the following stories, a rally for Latinos at the State Capitol, Austin city council member Mike Martinez announcing boundary lines for council seats, the Travis County Clerk talking about voting centers, the November election rundown, and a new option for confederate license plates.

#### **FREQUENCY OF USE**

The first research question for this part of the study, RQ 2 asked, what is the most common type of LNP story used in a newscast. The findings indicate the most common type of story aired on all four stations was a feature story (n=37) followed by consumer (n= 14), and government (n= 10).None of the stations used the crime, health, or transportation stories that were designated and shot for the LNP within their newscast. Table 6.1 compares the types of stories assigned to the LNP versus the stories used by all four stations.

**Table 6.1**

Story type assigned vs. story type used

Story Type	Number	Stories Used by Stations			
	Assigned	KVUE (#1)	KXAN (#2)	KTBC (#3)	KEYE (#4)
Feature	16	9	9	10	9
Consumer	9	1	6	4	3
Government	5	2	2	2	4
Education	3	1	2	1	0
Police	2	2	1	1	1
Health	2	0	0	0	0
Rally	1	0	0	1	0
Crime	1	0	0	0	0
Transportation	1	0	0	0	0
Other	1	1	1	1	1
Total		16	21	20	18

The results show nearly half of the feature stories assigned to the LNP aired on all four stations. In addition consumer and government, which were the second and third most assigned story types in the LNP, were also the most frequently utilized within the newscast in that same order.

## **PARTICIPATION LEVELS**

In order to understand how competition factors into the LNP manifest, the next research question for this part of the study RQ 4 asks, how does the level of participation affect the LNP partners. While the LNP is designed to create an equal playing field for

participants where each station is given the same content, this study found participation levels concerning the gathering of the story varied. A cross tabulation between the station and the stories assigned to the LNP found KVUE, the number one station in the market, took part the least by shooting seven of the 41 stories assigned during the one month period. KXAN, the number two station in Austin, shot the most (n=13), followed by KTBC (n=11), the number three station in the market, and lastly KEYE (n=10), the lowest rated station.

A second cross tabulation found KVUE's participation was tied to greater use of LNP stories. The results determined that out of the seven stories KVUE shot for the LNP the station used 71.4 percent within their newscast. KXAN gathered the most with 13 but only aired 46.2 percent, KEYE aired half of the 10 stories it shot, and KTBC used the least by airing 18.2 percent of the stories gathered for the LNP.

## **HOMOGENIZATION**

While the gathering of stories by the LNP varied by station, the results demonstrate a similar presentation of it within the newscast. The final question for this part of the study RQ 6b asked, does the LNP affects news homogenization. The content analysis is utilized in this study to determine if news stations in Austin, Texas, are using the LNP stories in similar or different ways. The three types analyzed were a vo (around 20 seconds in length), a vo/sot (45 seconds in length), and a package (more than one minute in length). The results show there were 23 vo's or 30 percent of the overall LNP

stories, 32 vo/sot's or 42 percent, and 21 packages resulting in 28 percent. Table 6.2 shows how those numbers are broken down by the station.

**Table 6.2**

Presentation of LNP within newscast

Story Presentation	KVUE (#1)	KXAN (#2)	KTBC (#3)	KEYE (#4)
VO (n=23)	4	9	3	7
Vo/Sot (n=32)	4	10	9	9
Package (n=21)	8	3	8	2
Total	16	22	20	18

A cross tabulation between story type and its use within the newscast found the feature was most often packaged (n=10), followed by consumer (n=3), and other (n=3). The feature category was also utilized just as frequently in shorter form stories such as vo's (n=14) and vo/sot's (n=13). While the feature story type was the most frequently assigned category for the LNP, the results show the least assigned story types such as health, transportation, crime, and other (refer to Table 6.1) were not used within the newscast by all four news stations.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this dissertation was to analyze how this new convergence model called the Local News Pool, or LNP, affects the gatekeeping process, to lay the groundwork for its inclusion within the hierarchy of influences model, discover the changes it causes within the organization, and determine if it has the potential to homogenize local news. This study discovered the LNP has led to multiple implications concerning news gathering and competing organizations working in a cooperative manner. By stations within a single market forming a partnership in an effort to share content such as video and interviews it was found to change the landscape of what was considered important news by producers, photographers put less emphasis on a story, and assignment editors employed familiar methods of decision making to choose the content for the LNP.

This chapter proceeds in four parts; first, is an analysis of the gatekeepers for the LNP and how this has led to a hierarchy of content sharing; second, a discussion of the changes to the organization as a result of the LNP and how this new convergence model adds and redefines certain parts of the hierarchy of influences model; third, an examination of the implications the LNP has on the homogenization of content provided under this cooperative news gathering method; and finally a reflection on the strengths and weakness of this research and what the LNP could mean in the bigger picture of journalism.

## **THE GATEKEEPERS**

One contribution this study provides is an update on the multi-layer gatekeeping process by adding competing organization's working together to make news decisions. The overall process in this study is similar to previous research that looked at multiple layers of gatekeepers (McNelly, 1959; Berkowitz, 1990; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). The local news pool functions within this process by involving assignment editors, producers, and photographers – that adds workers from multiple competing organizations. Much like McNelly (1959) found a foreign correspondent's story could be changed as it went through layers of gatekeepers, a local news pool story also is subject to these changes by the assignment editors making the initial story decisions, the photographers capturing the story, and the producers writing it for the newscast.

The first layer in this decision making process concerns assignment editors - it adds a new aspect to gatekeeping theory because it involves multiple workers from competing organizations communicating with each other to decide on news content. Previous research (Berkowitz, 1990) has only looked at this type of gatekeeping process for news stories within a single organization. This study found by incorporating assignment editors from several news stations making content decisions it led to a more compartmentalized view of news stories. Potential stories had to be classified into defined categories in order to be considered a shareable news item. This study found feature stories were easily defined by assignment editors and producers could contextualize how this type of story could fit into their show and be presented to the audience. A feature story could be described as content that presented stimulating video

for the audience or offered a happy story that producers could place at the end of a news block leading into a commercial break. These types of feature stories assigned to the LNP were more likely to be used by the producer versus an item that had a room full of people listening to someone speak at a podium.

The decision of whether a story was shareable was often based on the assignment editors' length of time in the news businesses and their past experiences with news stories pitched through a press release. Previous research has found decisions by gatekeepers over time can lead them to judge certain news stories and define them as predictable events (Tuchman, 1978). In the case of the LNP, these predictable events were easily defined by selecting feature stories. This is critical in determining which items move through the news channel and which ones are rejected (Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim, & Wrigley, 2001). This study found similar results. By using prior knowledge, the classification of stories into one that could be shared versus a story considered competitive was based on several factors – video content, effort, and how the station ranked among others in the market.

Much like White (1950) discovered Mr. Gates routinized his judgment of stories to fit into the editorial policies of the paper he worked for, the gatekeepers of the LNP must function in a similar manner to find non-competitive stories which are often classified as “features”. This routine of looking through press releases to discover elements that can fit into their agenda as something shareable is created by envisioning how the information provided translates into video and interviews available. Previous research (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) found this type of routine helpful because it allows

the organization to more easily and less ambiguously define news. Tuchman (1973) found that news workers “typify” events based on how the organization must deal with them. In the case of the LNP, assignment editors define stories based on how it is pitched to the station by an outside organization. This helps determine if it is a story that would result in every station gathering the same content if they sent their own crews.

The content analysis conducted in this study helps validate that by finding each station within the Austin, Texas, market utilizing similar stories that were shot for the LNP. Out of the 41 stories assigned during the one month period most were features (n=16). And because each station has the option to air the story in various formats this resulted in the creation of 37 feature stories across the four television stations. On the opposite end, stories least selected for the LNP like education and crime also were used less frequently in the newscast. Meaning that while stations have the option to air the story shot for the LNP in any form they wish, whether that would be a short 20 second vo or a minute-long package, workers more often chose to use the feature story. This finding could be a result of the producer’s experience and length of time in the news business. Feature stories can be predictable allowing the producer to more easily define how that content can be placed within a newscast versus another story type.

This overall selection process by the gatekeeper results in what this study has discovered and will call a hierarchy of content sharing (Table 8). This three-tiered table indicates the story types stations within the Austin, Texas, television market are most likely to cooperate and share among the group, the stories that appear to be neutral - meaning stations are willing to share but don’t have a great desire to air within their



newscast, and the level in which stations compete. These are story types rarely assigned to the LNP but are often found within a newscast.

**Table 8**

**Hierarchy of Content Sharing**

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Most likely to cooperate	Feature, consumer, and government
Neutral	Police, education, health, crime, rally, and transportation
Most likely to compete	Spot news, court, fire, military, and travel

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An explanation for why stations may be more willing to share certain stories such as features versus acting more competitive with items such as spot news may be due to the level of effort a station puts into a story. This research found stories that could be classified as something shareable such as a court case but would require a crew to drive a long distance or reshuffle a schedule might not be selected for the LNP. This doesn't mean a particular station won't gather it, it means the station may be less willing to share it.

This decision process also factors into the cooperative versus competitive nature of the television news business. This study found consistencies with previous research which discovered the expectations of a "counterpart's cooperativeness or competitiveness affects the demand and concession making process" often led by the motivation the negotiator brings to the table (Ten Velden, Beersma, & De Dreu, 2009, p. 438). This negotiation process for what stories are included in the LNP may factor in the level of

effort but a broader examination of this idea comes down to the gatekeeper's experience with the competition – and if they are willing to provide stories that may fall outside of the defined limits of the LNP. Previous studies found organizations that expect more cooperation engage in less lying and deception and make more concessions when their competition has a cooperative attitude versus a competitive one (Steinel & De Dreu, 2004). This study found similar results – assignment editors were more willing to act cooperatively when they perceived a competitor as doing the same.

Previous studies have found that negotiators experiencing “positive affect” are more cooperative, whereas those experiencing “negative affect” tend to be more competitive (Van Kleef, De Dreu, Pietroni, & Manstead, 2006). This study found most stations experience “positive affect” until something outside of the defined LNP occurs such as breaking news. Within the Austin, Texas, market the level of cooperation versus competition appears to be based on ratings. Papper (2010) found stations rated the highest often opted out of the LNP or had the least desire to take part. This study found similar results particularly in Austin through the content analysis. KVUE, the number one rated station, not only shot the fewest stories for the LNP (7 out of the 41) they also acted as an “appetitive” competitor. The literature (Higgins, 1998) defines that as someone motivated to win and more likely to have goals related to growth and accomplishment. On the flip side an “aversive” competitor wants to avoid losing and has goals related to protection and responsibility.

Because the assignment editors who act as the gatekeepers for the LNP take part in the daily negotiation process, the perception of how a competitor acts often results in a

decision to either help or not help gather a story they desire. For example, if a station is low staffed due to vacation or illness they may not take part in the LNP on a given day. As a result they may request a story listed on the LNP docket but state they don't have the ability to shoot it. Ten Velden, et al. (2011) found aversive competitors respond differently to their appetitive competitors depending on whether they perceive them behaving cooperatively or competitively. This study found by observing the conference call and daily e-mails from the LNP in the Austin, Texas, market that assignment editors at the lower rated stations were more willing to help competitors who also were lower rated versus a higher rated station. The perception of one's level of acting cooperatively or competitively resulted in a station's willingness to put effort into gathering a story, creating deception by not acknowledging it as something of interest, or lying and stating they wouldn't be able to shoot it. Unlike the previous research this study found each competitor was treated differently based on their level of cooperation and it was not uniform across the board.

In sum, this study found the gatekeepers of the LNP function under a multi-layer gatekeeping process. What this research adds to the body of literature on gatekeeping is the new element of competing stations working together within this multi-layer to decide story content for the newscast. The likely reason feature stories have become a prominent item selected for the LNP is because they are easy to classify as "non-competitive" by the gatekeeper. This is made possible by placing items such as press releases into categories fitting the policies created for the LNP. It allows the gatekeepers to have a general idea of what the photographer could capture for video and interviews –

making it possible to instruct them to shoot fewer than 20 minutes of content. Producers use this broad overview provided by the photographer and often the press release to write the story that is presented to the audience.

The element of competition presents itself during non-planned events such as spot news or stories that would require stations to put in additional effort or resources. An unwritten evaluation process was discovered that factors in a competing station's level of cooperation and if a certain story would give a station a competitive edge. Based on analysis of the daily e-mails and conference call in the Austin, Texas, market it was found those who were more cooperative within the negotiation process were more likely to receive content from other cooperative stations with stories not included on the LNP docket. Those who acted competitively never offered stories outside of the ones in which they were assigned to gather. This pattern led assignment editors to discover the limits in which they could request certain content. For example, bank robberies often became shared content because a request from a cooperative station resulted in another cooperative station providing it. At the same time this means a competitive station would also be provided the content - however this wasn't factored in because it was already classified as something "non-competitive" due to the fact that each station could likely gather the same video and interviews.

#### **ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES, CONVERGENCE, AND HIERARCHY OF INFLUENCE**

This research has presented a foundation for the new convergence model called the Local News Pool. Previous research has analyzed models dealing with print,

broadcast, and online (Landsberger, 2004; Ketterer, Weir, Smethers, & Back, 2004; Quinn, 2005) organizations working together in a collaborative manner but none have dealt with direct competitors within a single medium. This study demonstrates changes can occur within the organization when competitors from a single television news market are required to work collaboratively. The major findings in this section concern the additional job duties resulting in positive experiences, the LNP leading to changes in the media routines – specifically the routine reliance on other media, and the extramedia level within the hierarchy of influences.

This study used Gade's (2004) research as a basis for examining the organization. The addition of the LNP to the daily news gathering has resulted in assignment editors taking on the additional job of selecting stories that can be shared with the competition, photographers gathering content for competing stations, and producers relying on the competition to provide stories. Each position studied has been affected by this new convergence model. Deuze (2004) found a converged news setting can result in hardships on workers trying to find a balance between providing content for their own organization as well as the new ones that are part of the convergence – this study discovered the opposite. In fact each position found the benefits outweighed any type of negative impact it could have on their organization. Feldman (2000) finds it best to analyze changes in routines by looking at the reflections of the person involved in the change – their reaction determines its ultimate outcome. In this study, assignment editors in particular found this convergence model helpful on many levels – they had autonomy in story choice, photographers were less burdened with additional assignments, and

producers were given additional content. Other studies (Gade, 2004) found when organizations are restructured workers are expected to accept the changes and make them operate appropriately and that is the case for the television markets studied. Because these changes were mandatory workers found ways to incorporate them into their daily workflow and make it successful.

The aspects of autonomy, authority, and control over their work also may explain their satisfaction. Pollard (1995) found those values are key to job satisfaction and this study demonstrates that as well. Because the LNP is mandatory for workers to take part in, but there is no obligation by the producers to air the story, workers have a feeling of authority to state they don't want an LNP story in their newscast – essentially keeping control over the content presented to the audience.

In addition, because these changes occurred at multiple stations across the country during the economic downtown in 2009 it became more of an accepted practice not only within the organization but the industry. As the amount of news increased to allow for increased profits from advertisers staff was reduced (Papper, 2010) and, managers within the organization found the need to restructure. By enforcing this new policy of the LNP on workers it resulted in the organizational roles within the structure remaining the same - however it has reshaped their viewpoint. Previous research (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) found the roles that people fill in organizations largely determine their views – but this study finds when the LNP is established within the newsroom, despite workers keeping the same job and producing the same product, their viewpoint of that product is altered. For example, producers find feature stories important within their newscast especially

leading into a commercial break. But when the story is categorized as an LNP, some feature stories are described as “filler” instead of something needed for the news.

One explanation could be this new team approach to gathering news with competing organizations. Gade (2004) found teams can empower workers with more decision-making authority. While that aspect of empowerment is present with workers selecting stories and choosing whether to air them, this study found there is an internal struggle with the idea of acting as a “team” with the competition. This was particularly the case among photographers. Because they gather the content, this convergence model has been difficult due to it lacking acknowledgment of their work. This study found when photographers are assigned to an LNP story their mindset changes from one of pride in their work to less desire to create a memorable story. This doesn’t mean they shoot a lower quality product, it means they aren’t actively looking for a unique angle or visual for the story. The idea is to get the basic content and move onto the next story.

This lack of motivation is carried over to the producers who define what is and is not an important story for the newscast. Research (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) finds journalists rely heavily on each other for ideas and validation concerning stories. This is called “groupthink” or “pack mentality” and it’s often blamed for similar stories. But this study found when competing stations form a cooperative agreement this pack mentality is altered. Instead of multiple stations covering the same story, only one station covers it for the group. While the validation concerning its importance as a story is acknowledged by the assignment editors selecting it for the LNP, this study found producers in-turn put less emphasis on a story designated for the LNP. That means by a story getting classified

for the LNP, producers have less desire to place it within the newscast because they have validation other stations could run it.

This finding is unique to the literature because it provides a different viewpoint concerning the organizations routine of placing importance on the “intermedia” influence (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). By stations validating what stories they find important to cover for the LNP it didn’t result in a confirmation of other news workers judgment concerning what should be news – instead it led to the opposite. Journalists felt many LNP stories were less important because a competing organization desired it. This may explain why producers in this study continually described the LNP story as an “added bonus” or the “throw away story” instead of something needed for their show. Lowery (2010) explains it as a result of the organization being able to monitor the competition - reducing the uncertainty of what the other is focusing on. While that may be the case in certain instances it doesn’t explain why there is still an emphasis on stories involving every station sending their own reporter/photographer team. This study finds there’s a change in news values concerning what’s important and what’s not when a story is classified as shareable. Because of the validation and certainty the story offered is being shared among the competing stations it results in producers having less desire to air it.

Another explanation for this change may be due to the new convergence model following familiar practices of selecting news stories. Because the assignment editors use pre-planned “events” as the main source of story content for the LNP, workers can easily define its meaning. Shoemaker and Reese (1996, p. 121) find stories considered “events” offer routines that are helpful for the organization because it is “more easily and



less ambiguously defined as news.” Assignment editors in this study classified stories into various categories to define what could be considered for the LNP and what could not. Preplanned events which often came in the form of a press release are an example of a story considered for the LNP. These “events” make it easy for workers to visual what can be produced and if that would be considered a story worthy of the LNP. Much like Shoemaker and Reese (1996) found that gatekeepers measure a story by its importance, human interest, and proximity - the LNP functions the same way. These news values easily fit into the current routines established in newsrooms leading to an understanding by the producer of how the story could or could not fit into the context of the newscast.

These “events” typically are pitched through public relations firms. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) consider these press releases an outlet for public relations campaigns to focus public attention on a certain issue through the media. This study found by news organizations restructuring to form the LNP, public relations firms also restructured how to pitch and provide content to news outlets. Assignment editors reported press releases would specifically target the pool in the hope at least one station would cover the event but all stations would have the option of using it. Interviewees also said they felt these press releases resulted in more staged opportunities for video and interviews making it easier to visual the story’s potential.

Finally, this study found decisions, news values, and cooperation were similar between the three markets analyzed for this research. While Tampa operates its LNS as a separate organization, assignment editors used the same methods for deciding what could be considered newsworthy content, such as press releases. The value news workers

placed on the LNP was consistent across the three markets and none considered the shared content overly important for the newscast. The main concern by producers was the bigger story of the day often done by a reporter/photographer team.

One difference between these convergence models was breaking news. While Tampa utilized their LNS for this purpose regularly it didn't result in workers placing more emphasis on the stories shot. Instead it was viewed as a convenience because the crews covering the bigger news items of the day were not required to alter their schedule. Due to the competitive nature of the Denver market it never considered breaking news for its pool. Participants felt in order to maintain competitive, stations should limit what is shared and breaking news is something held to a higher standard than a feature story. The Austin market demonstrated how the cooperation level between stations produces content not originally intended for the LNP. Assignment editors would often agree to share or cover breaking news with the thought a competing station might return the favor in the future. In addition, the type of breaking news was also limited by its severity – meaning minor accidents, fires, or bank robberies were considered but a major accident on the highway was handled by individual stations. Also the type of video that could be captured was part of the decision and the amount of effort a station would have to put into the story in order to share it. For example, driving a long distance to cover an accident often resulted in stations not willing to share it with the competition. Overall, the LNP was created as a new convergence model out of the need by organizations to be more fiscally responsible during the economic downturn. By sharing content among competing organizations, news stations could provide more content without having to

hire additional staff. This resulted in news workers taking on additional duties, news stories becoming classified into shareable events, and a change in news values of what is considered important for the audience.

This study demonstrates that despite workers staying in the same job role viewpoints are altered when a new policy is enforced. However unlike other studies (Deuze, 2004) that found workers can face hardships with a new convergence model, this study finds that by allowing workers to have autonomy and control the level of satisfaction with the job can remain high despite the change in viewpoint. This is important because as news outlets continue to evolve job satisfaction is critical for the organization to run in an effective manner.

In addition this study adds a new layer to the “intermedia” routine. By labeling a story shareable under the LNP it alters the meaning of “group-think” or “pack mentality” to an item that receives validation and becomes less important to the newscast. This can be explained by producers having a general idea of what content can be provided from an LNP story. Because stories designated for the LNP rely on familiar routines for deciding if it is non-competitive and can be shared among stations, photographers put less effort into capturing the story and producers have less desire to air it.

Finally, the work of public relations firms which are considered to be a part of the “extramedia” level within the hierarchy of influences model (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) is altered with the presence of the LNP. While they still pitch stories targeting the media to cover a certain topic – the LNP has resulted in more specialized and staged opportunities for video and interviews. This study found public relations firms were

directly targeting the LNP within their pitch for the media to cover an event. This allowed assignment editors to more easily classify a story as shareable and it resulted in more pre-planned events being considered news worthy. While this study did not measure the amount of press release stories considered prior to the LNP, it was found that assignment editors reported these types of stories as the typical events covered in the pool agreement.

### **THE LNP'S EFFECTS ON NEWS HOMOGENIZATION**

Despite a wide range of stories captured for the LNP, this research discovered stations often chose similar topics to air in their newscasts. For example, the content analysis found 41 stories covering 10 different categories were shot during the one month time period. Topics included feature, consumer, government, police, education, rally, health, crime, transportation, and other. However despite the range of choices this study found stations overwhelmingly gravitated towards the “feature” stories versus the other categories.

While the purpose of this content analysis was not to analyze frame-for-frame how a story was told but instead to look at the bigger picture – it could be said that a form of homogenization exists by stations choosing to air similar stories and leaving others out. Groshek (2008) explains the decisions of similar news shown between television and online as a result of journalists being “socialized” into certain types of news coverage. That also may be the case concerning the LNP. For example, competing stations have the option to air the same LNP stories. However this study found producers

from different organizations select and leave out similar stories from the LNP list within their newscast. This form of news homogenization could be the result of news workers being “socialized” into what is considered the most newsworthy. Essentially workers utilize old practices of story selection to contextualize how this new form of news gathering can best serve viewers.

Donsbach (2004) explains similar story selection by calling these decisions a “shared reality”. He found achieving this shared reality requires a cooperative social activity, consensually validated social roles, and a cooperative relationship to form a mutual decision. The LNP achieves that by assignment editors forming a cooperative relationship to decide on story content that can ultimately validate the needs of this agreement. However this study adds a new layer to this “shared reality” when examining the producer. Because producers ultimately decide if a story is part of the newscast they are an outlier within this decision process. Unlike the assignment editors who have direct contact with the competition, producers make these decisions based on their needs for their newscast and audience. This research demonstrates that a “shared reality” can be achieved without having a direct relationship with the other parties involved in the cooperative partnership.

Time could also be a factor within the potential for homogenization. The LNP results in photographers shooting and feeding the story to the competition on an earlier deadline. For example, the newscast may go on at 5 p.m. but in order for a station to use it the deadline to feed or FTP the story is at 3 p.m. This can result in a photographer feeling pressure to shoot a story faster in order to meet the deadline, possibly missing key

elements to a story. Or in some cases it could result in the producer having less time to write the story in the event it arrives at the station late. Producers in this study said time was often a factor in determining if the story made it into the newscast. It also determined whether they had time to listen to the interviews or just write the story directly from the press release. A lesser amount of time could lead to more homogenization because producers are not able to listen for unique elements to the story provided by the interview – they only provide the details listed on the press release.

The results from this study also validate Geisler's (2009) "potential hazards" of pooling. His concerns dealt with stations missing out on contacts, sources, and finding additional stories. In addition Geisler found workers could devalue a pool story, staged events could increase, and pool video could become stenography. This study found similar results. Photographers interviewed for this research said they didn't look for additional stories when assigned to the LNP because their focus was to gather enough elements that would allow stations to make editorial decisions. By shooting no more than 20 minutes of video their goal became to get the overall picture of the event and not to focus on one particular aspect.

Assignment editors reported staged events in the form of a press release were often the most common story used for the LNP because it allowed them to visualize how the story could be produced. However this also led workers to devalue the story because of the knowledge that each station would be offered the same content. Even though photographers were assigned to capture enough video and interviews to allow stations the

opportunity to make the story appear different, this study found that wasn't a factor that led a producer to have a greater desire to include it in the newscast.

This study also found there was a lack of transparency with the audience concerning the LNP. News workers felt it was unnecessary and may cause confusion by stating or labeling a story as something produced through the pool. But this decision may ultimately impact the audience in a negative way. Tuchman (1978) believes news is “an institution that recognizes the items of importance to define aspects of social life which are important to citizens,” if that is the case the LNP creates a disservice to the public because there are limited ways to tell an LNP story. While measures are in place to create an objective story by the photographer taping what could be considered enough content to put together a vo/sot or 45 second story – by workers devaluing stories designated as LNP less effort is placed into it. Even though some LNP stories are defined as important by the producer placing them within their newscast, the audience may learn only the basics of who, what, when, where, and why instead of the more important information. By stations not labeling a story as something created through the LNP the audience is not able to judge for themselves if the story provides all of the information they feel is necessary to understand its overall meaning.

In sum, the LNP creates a new form of homogenization through the selection and execution of the stories assigned to the pool. Unlike multiple stations covering the same story, the LNP allows for limited coverage of an event due to the need to capture the big picture verses finding a unique side story. This is viewed as acceptable among the organizations involved because they feel efforts to create more enterprise stories have

increased as a result of the LNP and that will ultimately lead to fewer homogenized stories as stations try to set themselves apart from the competition.

This study adds to the literature by demonstrating workers do not need direct contact with those inside the cooperative agreement to form a shared reality. This could be a result of workers being socialized into what is considered news. All of the participants in this study had multiple years working in the news business and that could explain why they utilize old news practices in order to contextualize how the LNP fits into the news gathering cycle. This has resulted in feature stories becoming a predominant part of the LNP by the stations analyzed. In addition the content analysis found stations use this story type most often in various forms such as a vo, vo/sot, and package.

While this study did not provide a detailed analysis concerning the video and interviews used within the story and if they were similar to the competition, the research did determine through the depth interviews that each station is provided the same information. Whether that comes in the form of a press release or a taped interview, producers write their LNP story from the same information. This has the potential to lead to homogenized stories due to the lack of varied information.

#### **STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, AND THE FUTURE RESEARCH**

The primary strength of this research is the foundation it has constructed for what is called the Local News Pool. This new convergence model has not been presented into the literature thus far and this research allows for the framework concerning competing



television news organizations working in a cooperative manner to be structured for future studies. What also helped this study was the use of mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative). This created richer results by gathering depth interviews of first-hand accounts of how the LNP functions on a daily basis. In addition the content analysis allowed for a broad look at the use of LNP stories within the organization – something participants would only have been able to hypothesize because none of the stations within this study track their use of the LNP.

There also are several weaknesses in this study including the lack of ability to generalize the results to other stations operating an LNP. While this study offered a broad look at three separate pool agreements and demonstrated how each functions and operates in a unique fashion, the results can only be generalized to the population studied and not industry-wide. Another weakness dealt with several stations opting not to take part in the research. Because this study analyzed the negotiation process (Chapter Six) between competing organizations it would have added more depth to hear from all parties involved in order to garner a better understanding of the process. This also limited the number of overall potential participants within this study. Previous research on data saturation has found fewer than 20 participants to be a fair representation in order to show the basic themes (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). And while this study does provide the basic themes and the interview process showed redundancies in responses, additional participants may have provided pertinent details to the main themes of this paper.

And finally a weakness to the content analysis concerns its coding structure. Coders were instructed to code for the first LNP story watched on a given station. For example, if the coder watched the 6 p.m. news and saw an LNP story they were instructed to code for the first LNP story seen within the broadcast of each station. The weakness to doing this is that news stations often re-air stories in several different news shows. For example, the producer of the 5 p.m. news could put a vo of the LNP story while the producer of the 6 p.m. broadcast could utilize it as a vo/sot. Because this study was gathering a broad look at the LNP's uses the coding method used within this research is appropriate and provides a general analysis. However it might be fruitful for future studies to analyze the LNP's multiple uses within a broadcast or to determine if it is used multiple times and how.

With that pointed out future research into this cooperative partnership among competing television stations is needed. Several questions are left to be answered following this study such as, how do the policies created by the news directors read and are they in line with how the LNP is functioning? Because this research looked at the workers who make the LNP function on a day-to-day basis and not the management who created the policies, future research could analyze how the structure was initially thought out and if it's congruent with its current uses. Depth interviews with news directors or corporate managers would also provide more insight into the economic factors surrounding the LNP. Participants in this study could only hypothesize how this pool agreement was a money saving venture but could not directly point out how it was helping the organization fiscally.

Other questions could explore the LNP's lack of transparency with the audience. The use of a focus group could be helpful to analyze if viewers take notice of this pool agreement and to discover its impact. Further analysis is also needed on its uses within various markets. Because this study only analyzed a one month time period in the Austin, Texas, market, additional analysis on various markets could add further depth to the types of stories being utilized within the pool. And finally, further analysis of the organizational changes is needed to determine if other pool agreements devalue a news story that is classified as shareable. This could help validate the finding within this study that the "pack mentality" is altered when a story becomes labeled as part of the pool agreement. Other studies could examine the strengths and weaknesses of the markets that take part in an LNP. It also would be important to learn how satisfied journalists are with this convergence model by surveying workers.

## **CONCLUSION**

What I have presented in this dissertation on the Local News Pool is a broad view of its operation, functions, and uses. As these cooperative pool agreements between competing television stations within a single market become more commonplace within the industry, it's important to understand how it will impact workers, the organization, and the potential implications for the audience. This study found the LNP is created as a new method for news gathering but workers utilize old, familiar methods in order to make it function.

By assignment editors classifying various stories into shareable news items this study finds it impacts not only how the story could be told but also its use within the newscast. Once a story is agreed upon by workers as part of the LNP it changes the story's overall meaning into one devalued by both photographer and producer. This leads to photographers capturing the basic elements of the story instead of looking for a deeper meaning, a side angle, contacts, or sources. Producers devalue the LNP story with the basic knowledge the competition may air it. This validation is different from the well researched idea of "pack mentality" where workers place more value on a story because the competition also finds it important. By classifying a story as something that can be shared among the group, it becomes of lesser importance.

One explanation is found by looking at this study's updated version of a multi-layer gatekeeper method that results in different organizations working together to create similar news decision. This research found assignment editors from various markets all had a direct understanding of what was desired from this pool agreement and what content could be produced from stories. On the surface this arrangement may lead to additional stories for newscasts but the wider implications of this type of news coverage lowers the quality of the content and leads to an apathetic news worker. Essentially this new multi-layer gatekeeping process doesn't change a story as it goes down through the layers as previous studies found (McNelly, 1959), instead it changes its overall importance and potential meaning by it being placed within the LNP.

Still, workers within these organizations find satisfaction with this new process because of the autonomy allowed with news decisions and it has created a new outlet for

gathering stories that in the past would have interrupted the day's workflow. For example, a photographer could be in the process of working on a story with a reporter when the assignment editor instructs him to pick up an additional story for the newscast. With the creation of the LNP, that duty now falls on the photographer assigned to cover stories for the group. It takes the pressure off workers to rush through an assigned story to gather something extra and producers ultimately have more content to choose from.

However, what often hinders this new process is the negotiation between news stations on who can gather what. Because each is dealing with unique schedules and staff the negotiation process can lead to one station producing more content than the others. It also becomes a challenge when a request for content not originally intended for the LNP is made. While ratings, attitude, and effort put forth by a station to gather a story are factored into the decision of whether to share a story, assignment editors are very cognizant of which stations are willing to cooperate and which are not. This results in some receiving more help on non-related LNP stories than others.

In the realm of journalism the LNP is only a small fraction of the day's news. Within a half hour newscast it may encompass less than one minute of the overall show. But the process by which organizations decide, gather, and implement stories has the potential to impact journalism for future generations. Because participants within this study all worked prior to the creation of the LNP they have knowledge and experience of how to create news without the aid of competing stations. However as these pool agreements become more widespread within the industry, new journalists will be socialized into this type of arrangement from the start of their career. It will become

commonplace in their experience to work with the competition to gather stories. This is where journalism may ultimately be altered because it could lead to reporters generating stories for the competition and additional sharing of content. This can result in fewer voices being heard in the media and stories with less depth and breadth for the audience – something that is already occurring with the LNP. While current journalists appear to be cognizant of potential pitfalls, it is important for workers to continue to place limits on the LNP's growth to prevent journalism from becoming one dimensional.

In the future it wouldn't be out of the realm of possibility that the Federal Communications Commission will regulate these cooperative partnerships. Much like the government stepped in to create the Newspaper Preservation Act in an effort to regulate the joint operating agreements, television stations could find themselves in the same predicament. This could especially be the case when it comes to labeling the video as part of a content sharing agreement. The end result of such regulation could lead stations to end their partnership or work around any guidelines.

It will also be important to continue an analysis of the LNP if stations gain financial stability and elect to keep, change, or end their content sharing agreements. One prediction is many larger markets will end their agreements only for smaller markets to pick up on this concept. This could have implications for journalists who are just starting their careers and alter their mindset from the beginning of the competitive versus cooperative nature of television news.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Participant Profile

Job title	News market
Assignment editor 1	Austin, Texas
Assignment editor 2	Austin, Texas
Assignment editor 3	Austin, Texas
Assignment editor 4	Denver, Colorado
Assignment editor 5	Denver, Colorado
Assignment editor 6	Tampa, Florida
Assignment editor 7	Tampa, Florida
Producer 1	Austin, Texas
Producer 2	Austin, Texas
Producer 3	Austin, Texas
Producer 4	Denver, Colorado
Producer 5	Denver, Colorado
Producer 6	Tampa, Florida
Producer 7	Tampa, Florida
Photographer 1	Austin, Texas
Photographer 2	Austin, Texas
Photographer 3	Austin, Texas
Photographer 4	Denver, Colorado
Photographer 5	Denver, Colorado
Photographer 6	Tampa, Florida
Photographer 7	Tampa, Florida

## **Appendix B: E-mail invitation for interviews in the Austin, Texas, market**

**IRB APPROVED ON: 1/30/2012**  
**EXPIRES ON: Exempt Status**  
**IRB PROTOCOL #: 2011-11-0100**

[E-mail sent on 1/31/2012]

Dear XXX,

It's Kate Weidaw from KXAN. As many of you know I am working on my Ph.D. in journalism at the University of Texas. For my dissertation I'm studying our Local News Pool and need to interview those who take part in its process every day.

I'm writing because I would like to interview you concerning your role in the LNP. This would be a face-to-face interview that I would audio record. The interview should take about 30 minutes of your time. It's an important part of my study as I examine not only how the LNP functions but also its impact on those who take part in it on a daily basis.

Please know that your identity will be confidential in my study.

If you are interested in participating please respond with potential dates and times that you are available within the next week or so.

Thanks!

Kate Weidaw  
Morning Reporter, KXAN  
Ph.D. Student, University of Texas, Austin



**FOR THOSE OUTSIDE OF THE AUSTIN, TEXAS, MARKET**

Dear XXX,

My name is Kate Weidaw, I'm the Morning Reporter at KXAN in Austin, Texas, as well as a Ph.D. student at the University of Texas. For my dissertation I'm studying what we call the "Local News Pool" or "Local News Service" and am interested in interviewing those who take part in its daily process.

I'm writing because I would like to interview you concerning your role in the LNP. We could either conduct the interview via phone or Skype and our conversation would be recorded. The interview should take about 30 minutes of your time. It's an important part of my study as I examine not only how the LNP functions but also its impact on those who take part in it on a daily basis.

Please know that your identity will be confidential in my study.

If you are interested in participating please respond with potential dates and times that you are available within the next week or so.

Thanks!

Kate Weidaw  
Morning Reporter, KXAN  
Ph.D. Student, University of Texas, Austin

## **Appendix C: Interview Guide**

### Interview questions for assignment editors

- 1) How long has the LNP been utilized within your market?
- 2) Who is in charge of running your station's LNP on a daily basis?
- 3) How many days per week does the LNP take place?
- 4) What does your station typically share under the LNP agreement?
- 5) What is the purpose of having an LNP in your market?
- 6) How does your station decide which stories should be part of the daily LNP?
- 7) What types of stories are typically considered for the LNP?
- 8) When you consider every station's participation in the LNP, on average how many stories per day does it produce?
- 9) While everyday is different in the news business, on average how many stories does your station shoot per day for the LNP?
- 10) Out of the stories that are shot by each station, on average how many LNP stories does your station air per day?
- 11) When you consider the overall process of gathering the story for the LNP, how many hours do you spend per day working on it?
- 12) What do you think of the LNP as a method for gathering news?
- 13) Has the LNP created additional or less work for you? If so, how?
- 14) All things considered, how has the LNP affected your ability to produce and gather news?
- 15) How has working on the LNP changed your daily routine of news gathering?
- 16) One purpose of the LNP is to allow for more enterprise reporting. Do you feel your station's enterprise reporting has changed as a result of the LNP?
- 17) Are there official rules between the stations on how the LNP should operate? If so, who created the rules and what are they?
- 18) Has your station ever shared spot news or other items that do not fall under the "official rules" for the LNP?
- 19) Is your station ever willing to share content with a competing station in an effort that station will help you in the future? For example, your station was able to shoot a car accident that a competing affiliate missed. Would you be willing to share it in the hope they would provide similar content for your station in the future?
- 20) The LNP is described as a cost savings method to gathering news. Is it a cost savings at your station? And if so, how are those cost savings invested at your station?

- 21) How many of those affiliates take part in the LNP?
- 22) How long have you been working in the television news business?
- 23) Overall, what is your station ranked within your market?
- 24) Do you have any final thoughts that I didn't ask?

Interview questions for producers

- 1) How does your LNP work?
- 2) Are there official rules between the stations on how the LNP should operate? If so, who created the rules and what are they?
- 3) Out of the stories that are shot by each station, on average how many LNP stories does your station air per day?
- 4) How does your station typically utilize the LNP within the newscast?
- 5) When you consider the overall process of gathering the story for the LNP, how many hours do you spend per day working on it?
- 6) What do you think of the LNP as a method for gathering news?
- 7) How it changed your daily routine of news gathering?
- 8) Has the LNP created additional or less work for you? If so, how?
- 9) All things considered, how has the LNP affected your ability to produce and gather news?
- 10) Do you think the LNP is good or bad way for your station to gather a portion of its daily news content? Why?
- 11) Is your station ever willing to share content with a competing station in an effort that station will help you in the future? For example, your station was able to shoot a car accident that a competing affiliate missed. Would you be willing to share it in the hope they would provide similar content for your station in the future?
- 12) One critique of the LNP is the audience is not aware that the video and interviews they are seeing have been shot by a competing station. Do you think the video aired from the pool agreement should be labeled as such so the public is aware? Why?
- 13) Do you agree or disagree with the following comment: One concern about the LNP is by sharing content each station will have a similar story.
- 14) How does your station set itself apart from the others when sharing content such as video and sound bites?
- 15) One critique of the LNP is by sending one photographer for the group a station could potentially miss additional stories or interviews because they are not present to gather it or look for those elements. How much of a concern is this for you?

- 16) How long have you been working in the television news business?
- 17) Do you have any final thoughts that I didn't ask?

Interview questions for photographers

- 1) When you consider the overall process of gathering the story for the LNP, how many hours do you spend per day working on it?
- 2) What do you think of the LNP as a method for gathering news?
- 3) Has the LNP created additional or less work for you? If so, how?
- 4) All things considered, how has the LNP affected your ability to produce and gather news?
- 5) How has working on the LNP changed your daily routine of news gathering?
- 6) Do you think the LNP is good or bad way for your station to gather a portion of its daily news content? Why?
- 7) One critique of the LNP is the audience is not aware that the video and interviews they are seeing have been shot by a competing station. Do you think the video aired from the pool agreement should be labeled as such so the public is aware? Why?
- 8) Do you agree or disagree with the following comment: One concern about the LNP is by sharing content each station will have a similar story.
- 9) How does your station set itself apart from the others when sharing content such as video and sound bites?
- 10) One critique of the LNP is by sending one photographer for the group a station could potentially miss additional stories or interviews because they are not present to gather it or look for those elements. How much of a concern is this for you?
- 11) How long have you been working in the television news business?
- 12) Do you have any final thoughts that I didn't ask?

## Appendix D: Codebook for content analysis

Variable Number	Category Names and Codes	Description
V1	Name of Story	Write in short description of story – keep it the same name for each station that uses the story
V2	<u>Station Shooting the story</u> 1. KXAN (NBC) 2. KVUE (ABC) 3. KTBC (FOX) 4. KEYE (CBS) 99. Missing	Based on the LNP list label the station that is assigned to shoot the LNP story based on the title given in V1.
V3	<u>Identify Station</u> 1. KXAN (NBC) 2. KVUE (ABC) 3. KTBC (FOX) 4. KEYE (CBS)	Label the station in which you are viewing for coding the LNP story.
V4	<u>Did Station Use</u> 1. Yes 2. No	Yes if the station aired the LNP story – no if not viewed.
V5	<u>If yes, VO?</u> 1. Yes 2. No	If a voice over is observed for the LNP.
V6	<u>If yes to V4, Vo/Sot?</u> 1. Yes 2. No	If a voice over with a sound bite or interview is observed for the LNP.
V7	<u>If yes on V4, PKG?</u> 1. Yes 2. No	If a package which includes voice over and sound bites that is produced by a reporter is observed for the LNP.
V8	<u>Story Type</u> 1. Police 2. Fire 3. Crime 4. Spot news	Based on the way in which the story is presented label the following as such.

	5. Court 6. Consumer 7. Military 8. Rally 9. Feature 10. Sports 11. Health 12. Education 13. Government 14. Travel 15. Other 99. Missing	
V9	<u>Newscast</u> 1. 5 p.m. 2. 6 p.m. 3. 9 p.m. 4. 10 p.m.	Newscast in which the LNP was observed.

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Katharine Elizabeth West has been a television journalist since completing her undergraduate degree in communication from the University of Massachusetts in 1998. She has worked in Clarksburg, West Virginia, Roanoke, Virginia, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and Austin, Texas, at various network affiliates. Katharine received her M.A. from the University of Texas, Austin in 2008 and continued onto doctoral studies upon completion of that degree. In August of 2012 she will be an Assistant Professor in the Telecommunications Department at the University of Georgia.

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